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(12) **United States Patent**
Stretch

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(54) **VALVE HAVING INTEGRATED PRESSURE ASSIST MECHANISM**

(75) Inventor: **Dale A. Stretch**, Novi, MI (US)

(73) Assignee: **Eaton Corporation**, Cleaveland, OH (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 512 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **12/476,989**

(22) Filed: **Jun. 2, 2009**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

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Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 61/058,083, filed on Jun. 2, 2008.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
F16K 1/44 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
USPC **137/625.35**; 137/597; 137/637; 251/30.01

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
USPC 251/325, 321, 333, 30.01; 137/625.69, 137/625.35, 625.68, 637, 597
See application file for complete search history.

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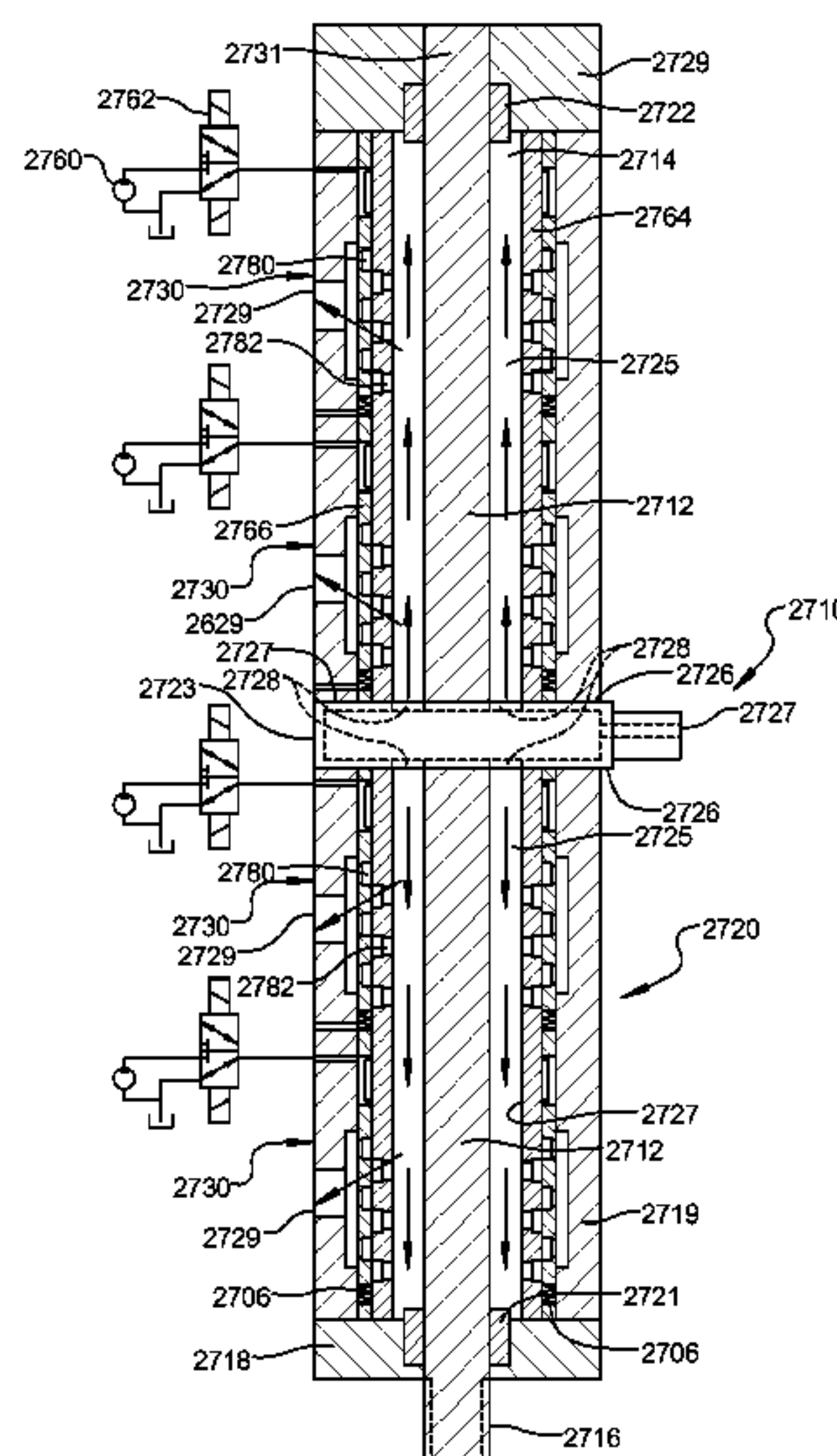
Primary Examiner — Eric Keasel

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Rader, Fishman & Grauer PLLC

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A valve is provided including a first valve member and a second valve member. The first valve member includes a first step and a first orifice adjacent the first step. The second valve member includes a second step and a second orifice adjacent the second step. The second valve member is movable relative to the first valve member between an open position, in which the first orifice is fluidly connected the second orifice, and a closed position, in which the first orifice is substantially fluidly disconnected from the second orifice. The first and second steps are fluidly connected to the second orifice and substantially fluidly disconnected from the first orifice when the second valve member is in the closed position, and the first and second steps are fluidly connected to the first and second orifices when the second valve member is in the open position.

17 Claims, 30 Drawing Sheets



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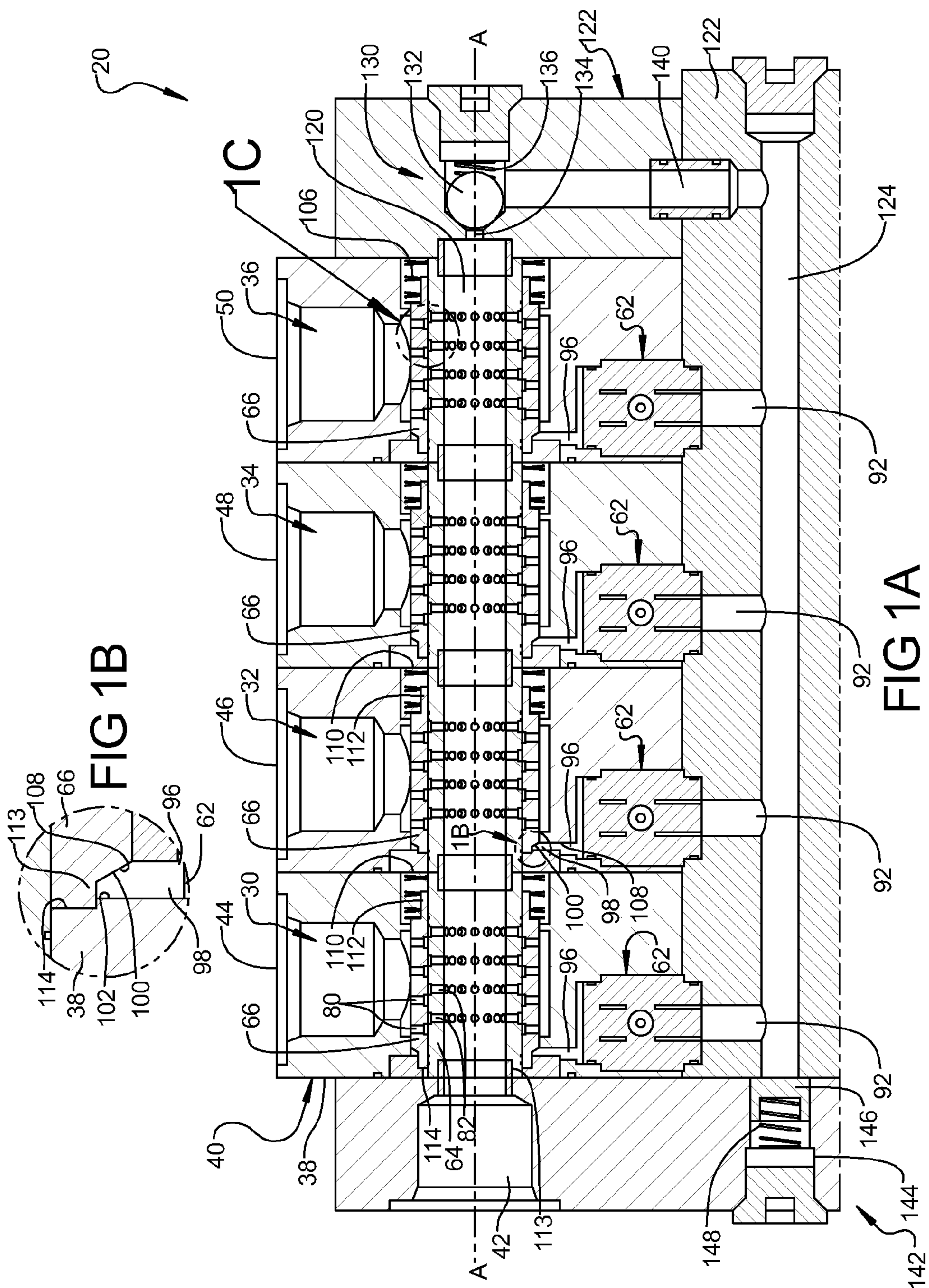


FIG 1C

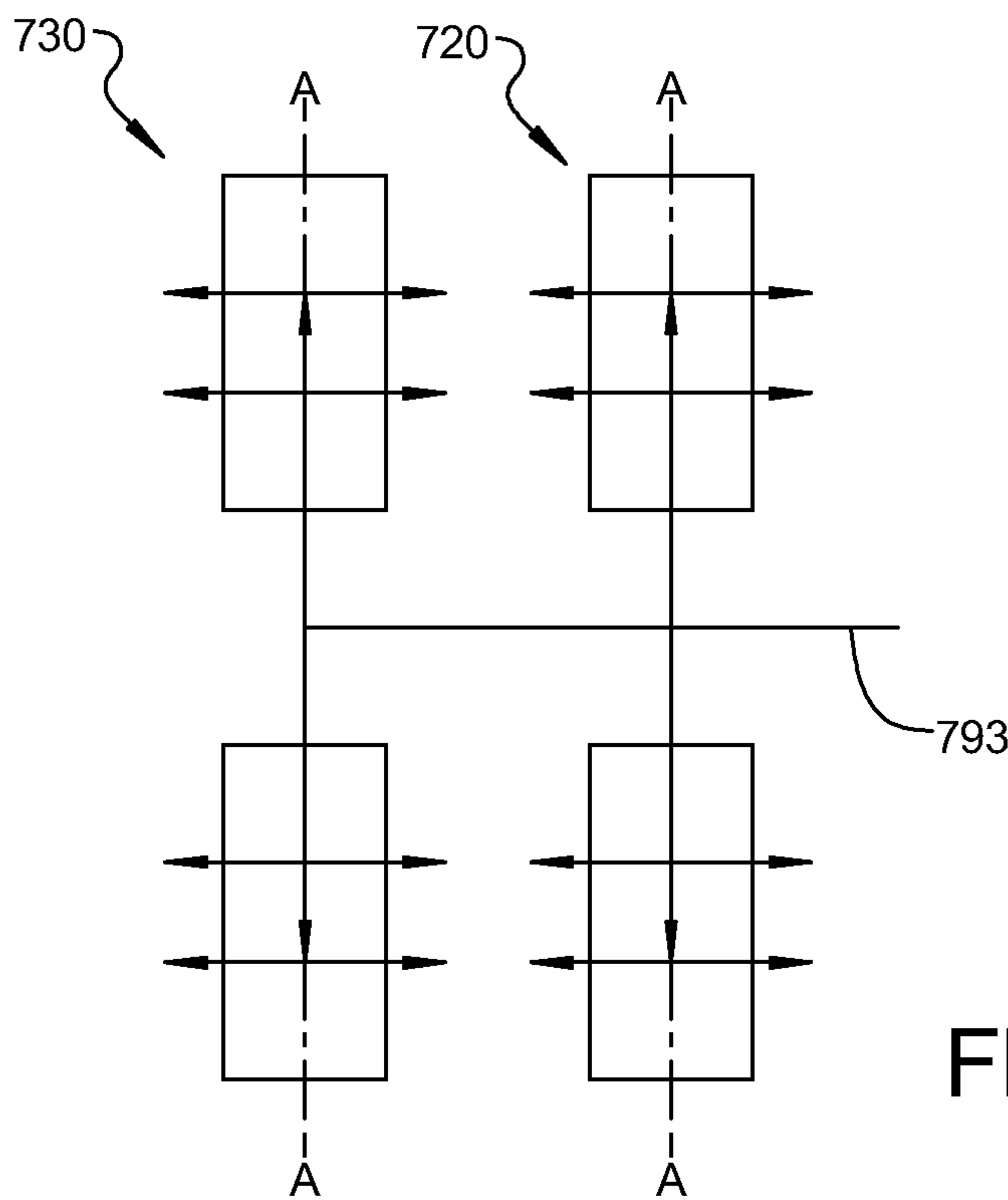
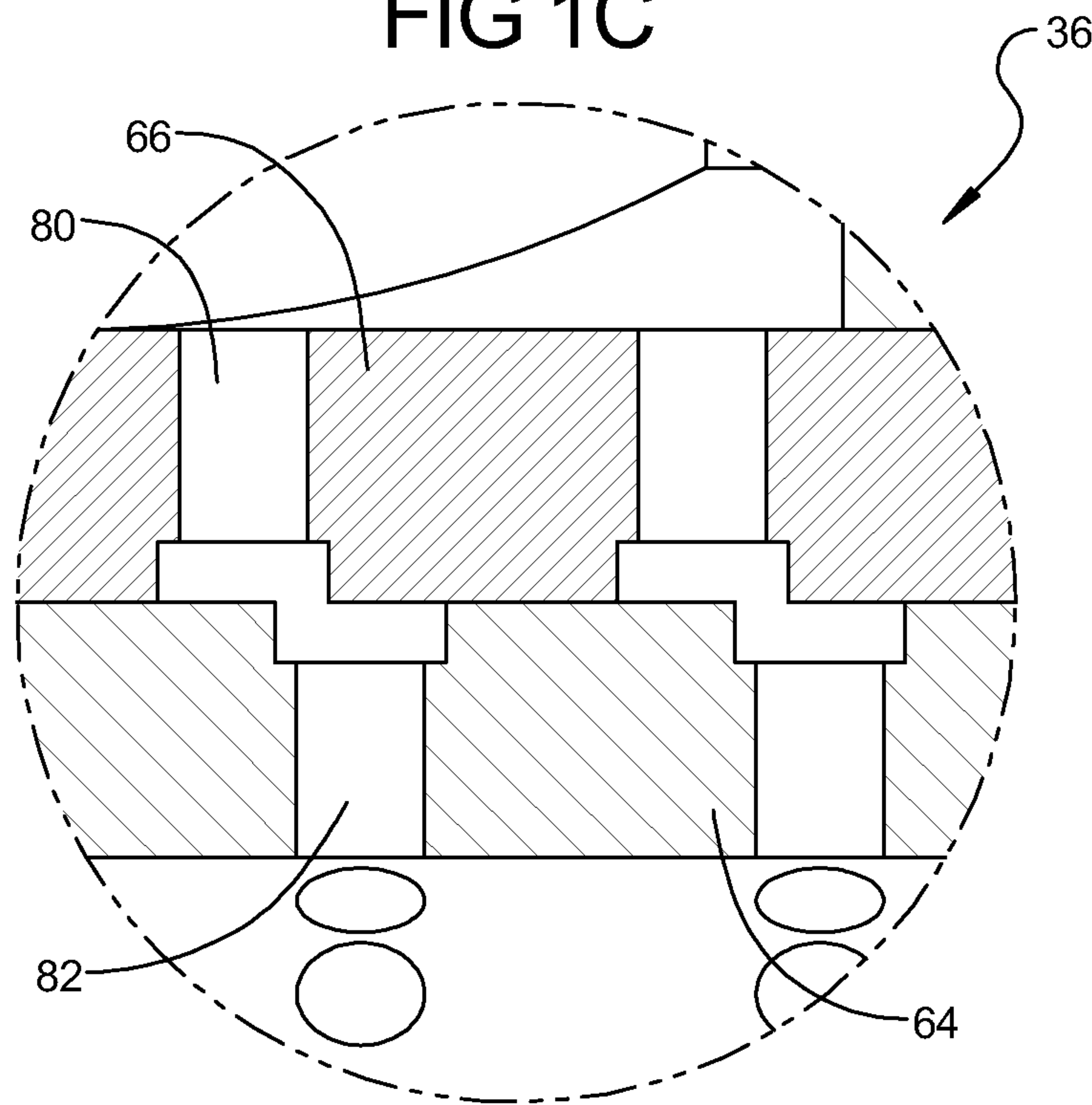
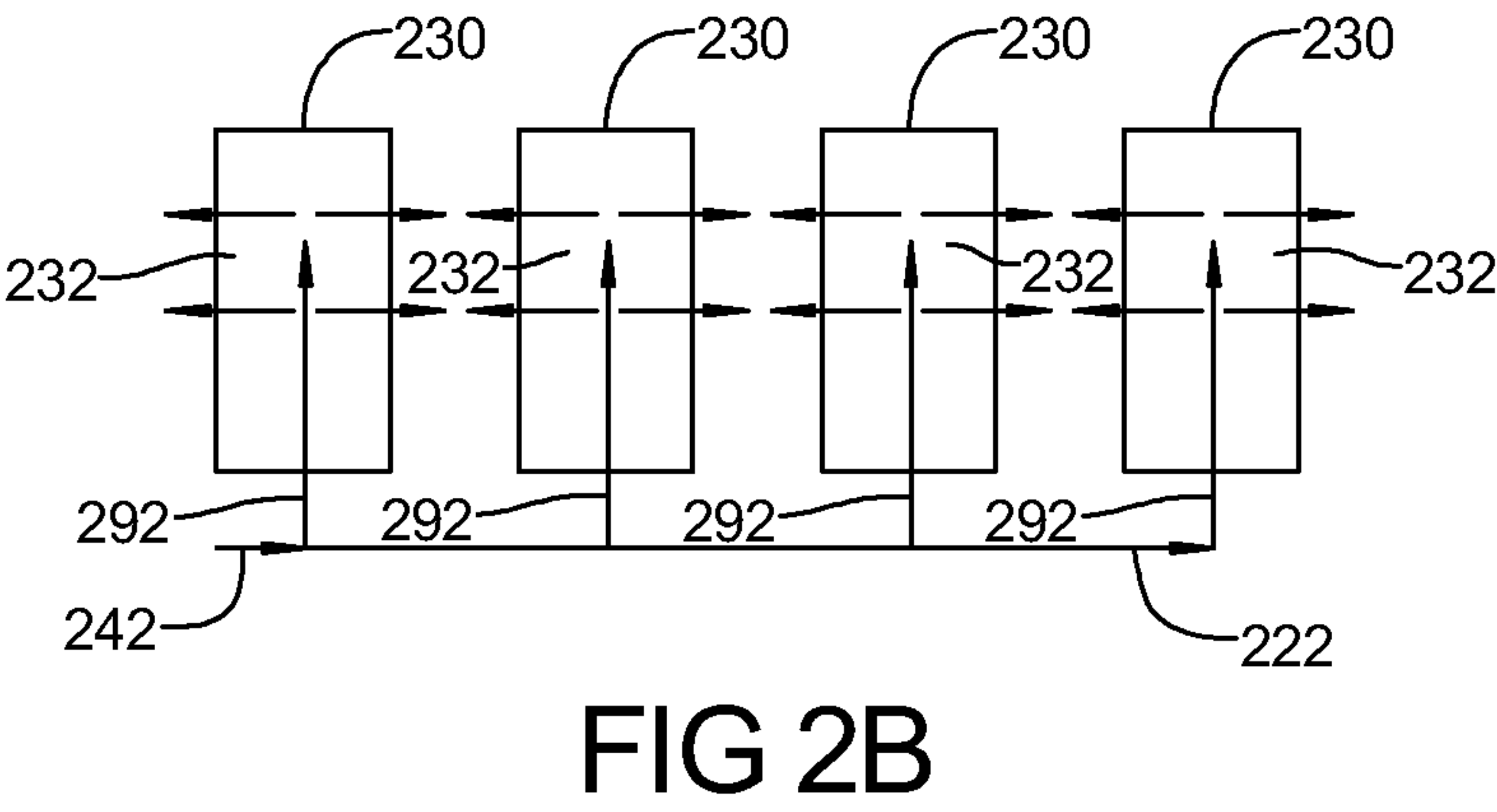
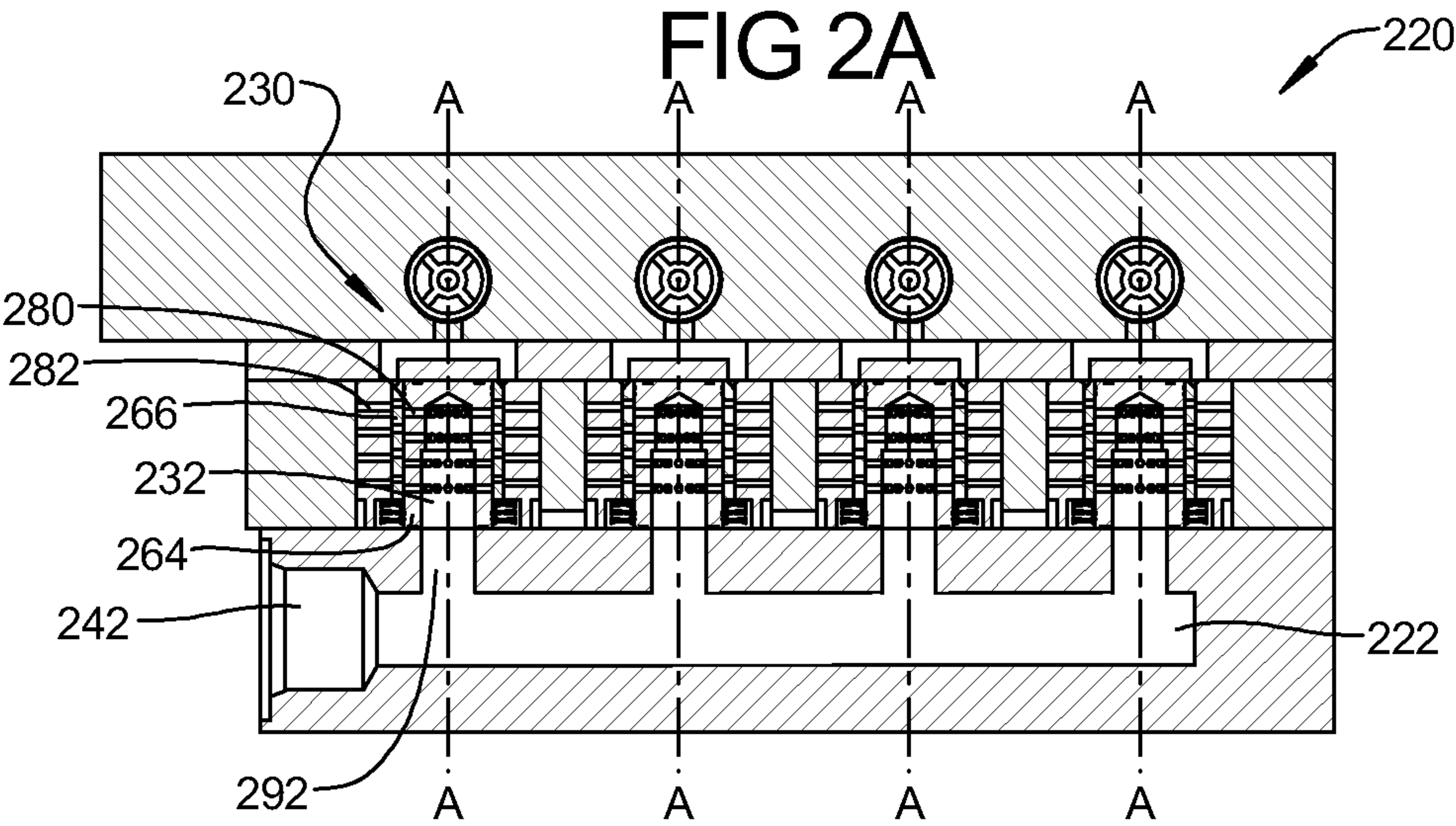


FIG 7B



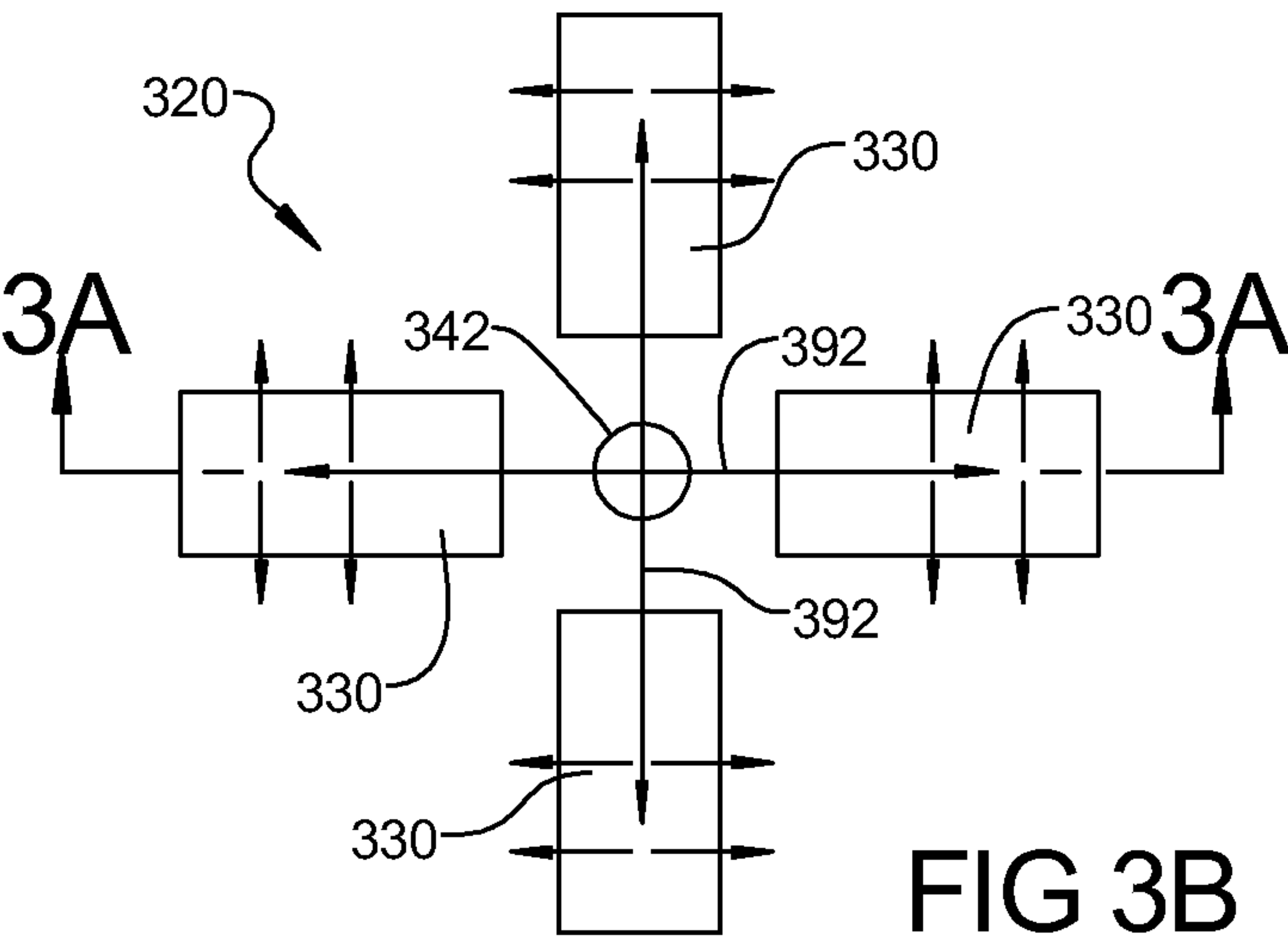
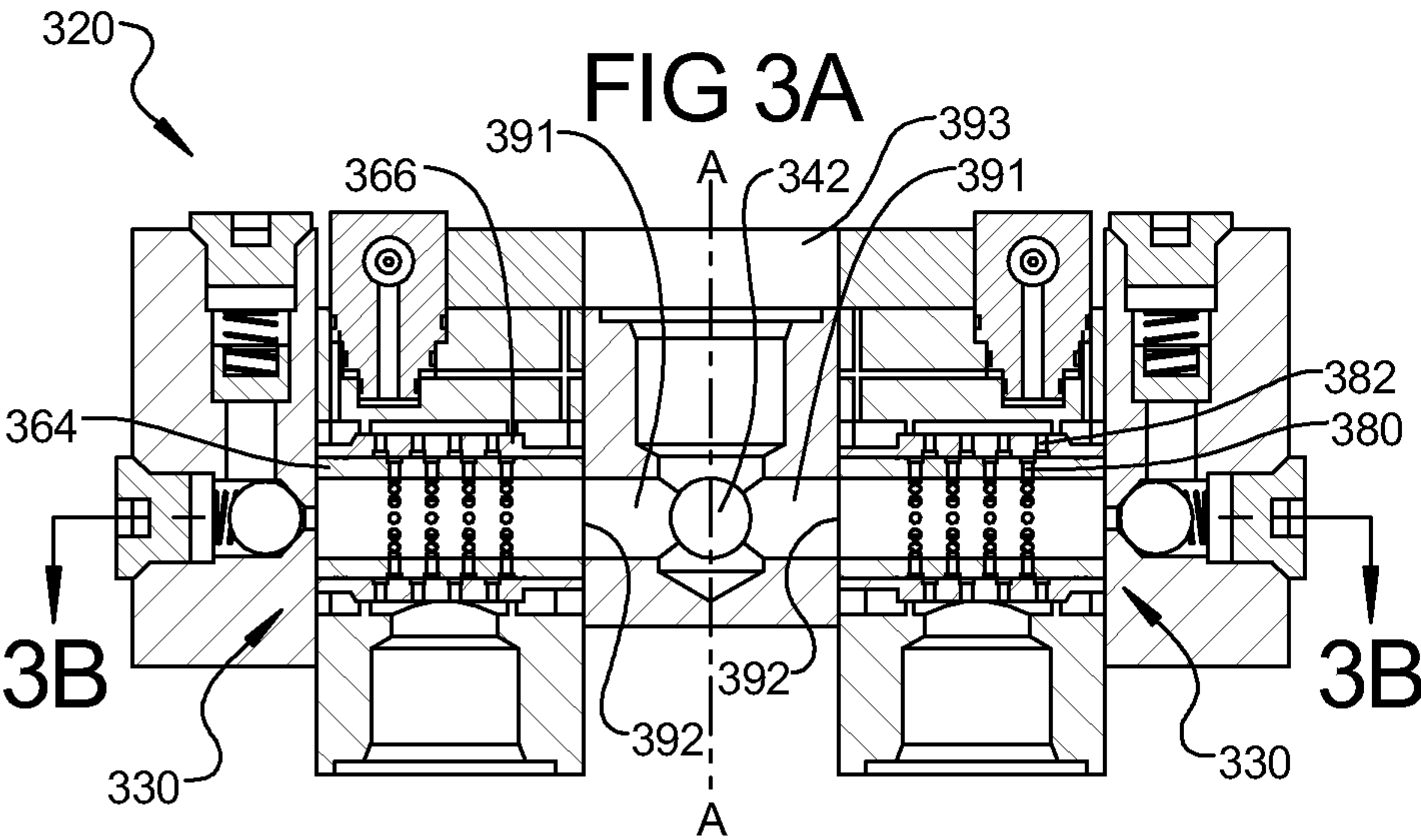


FIG 4

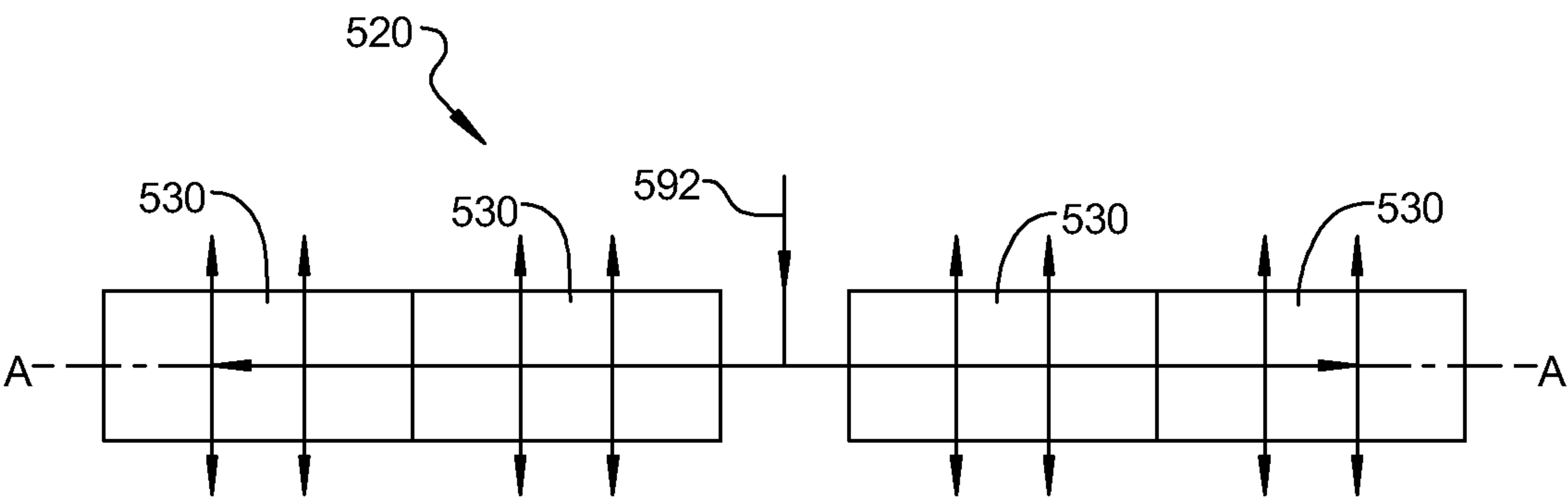
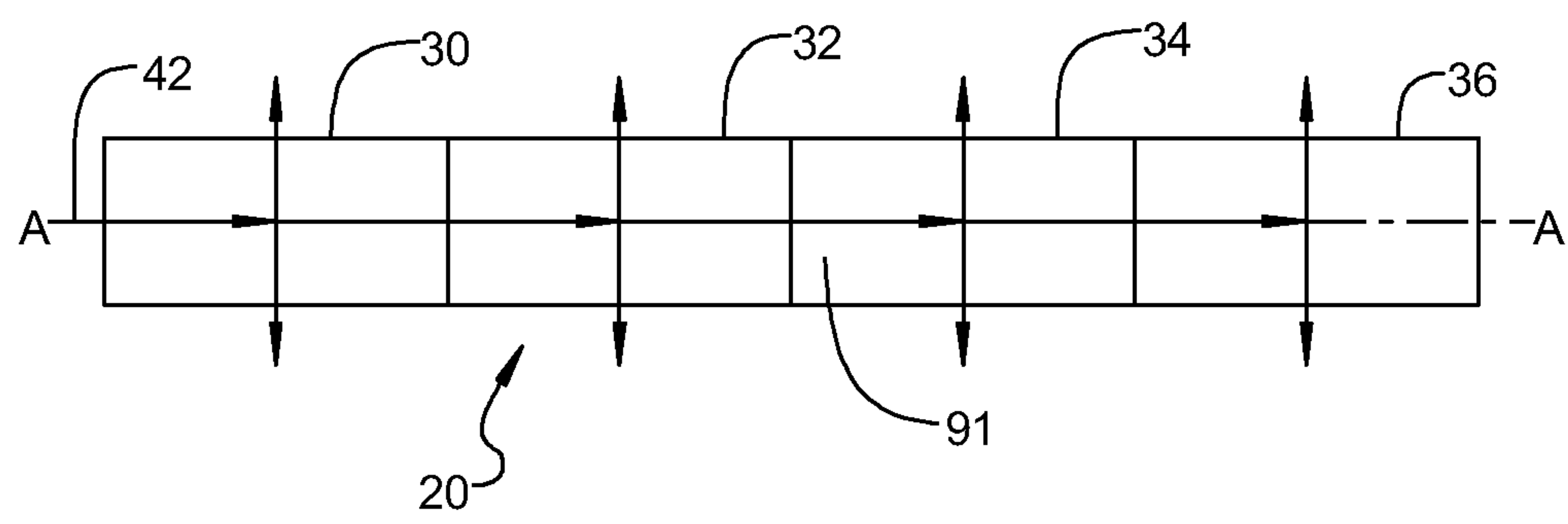


FIG 5

FIG 6A

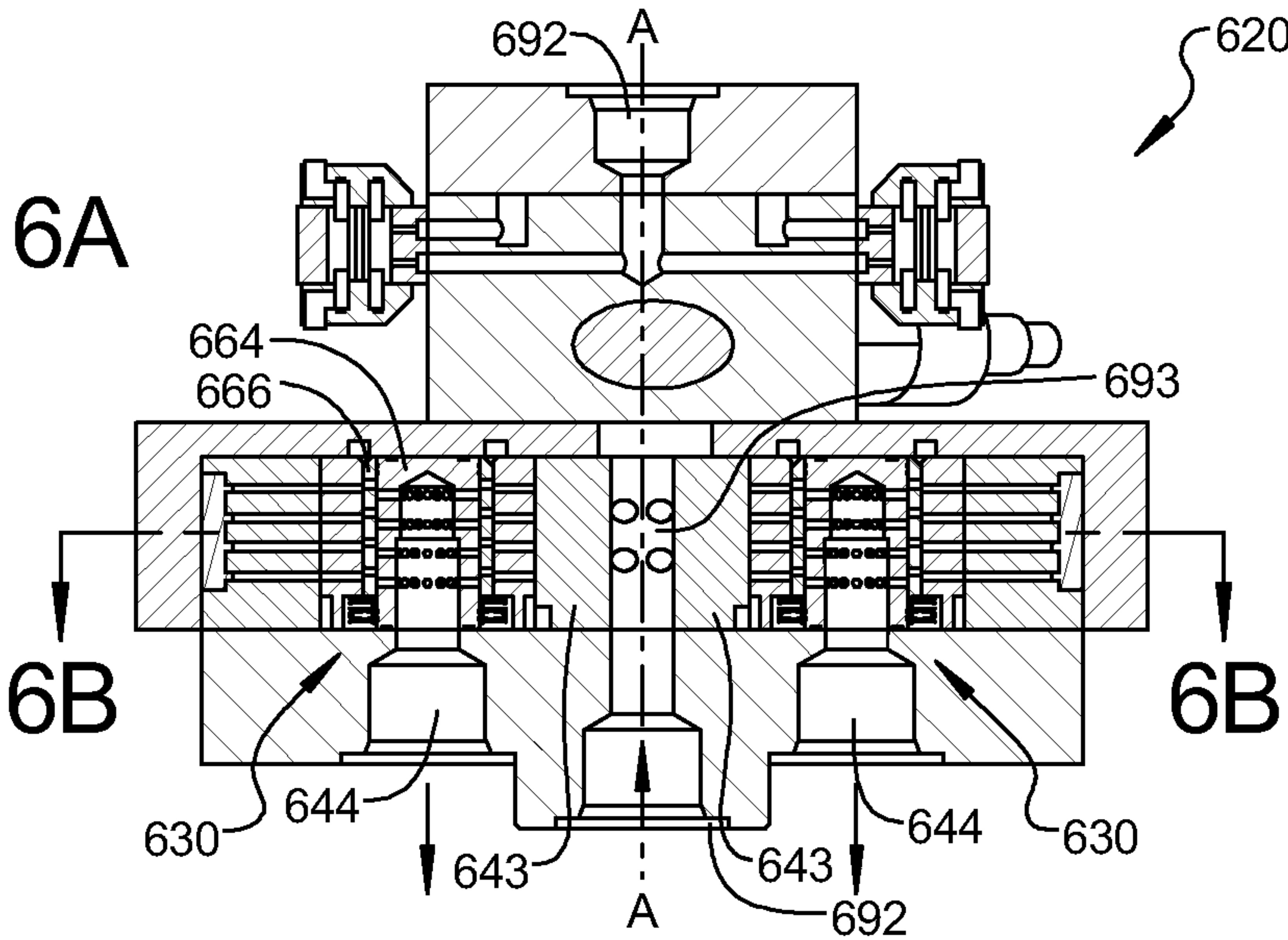


FIG 6B

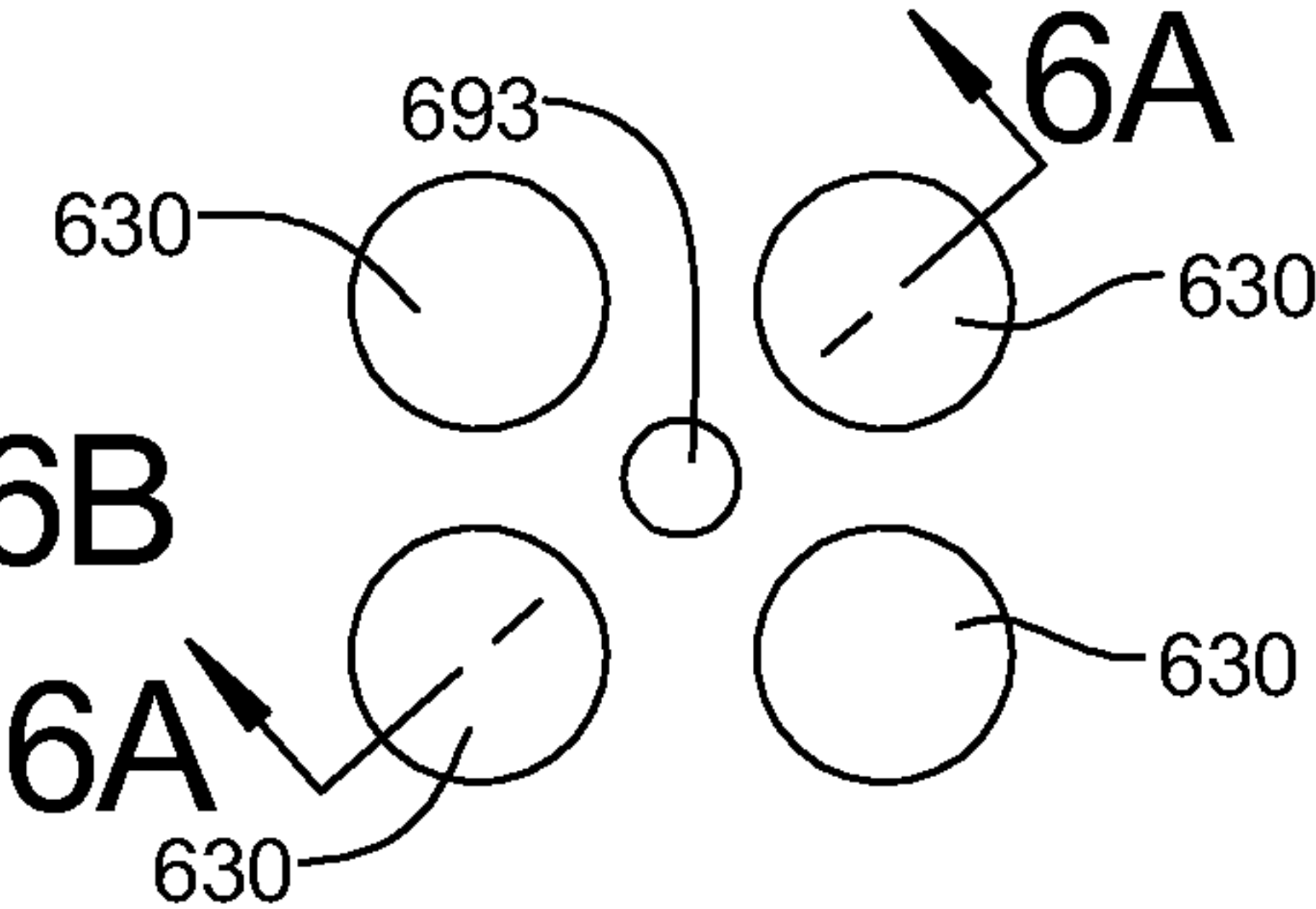
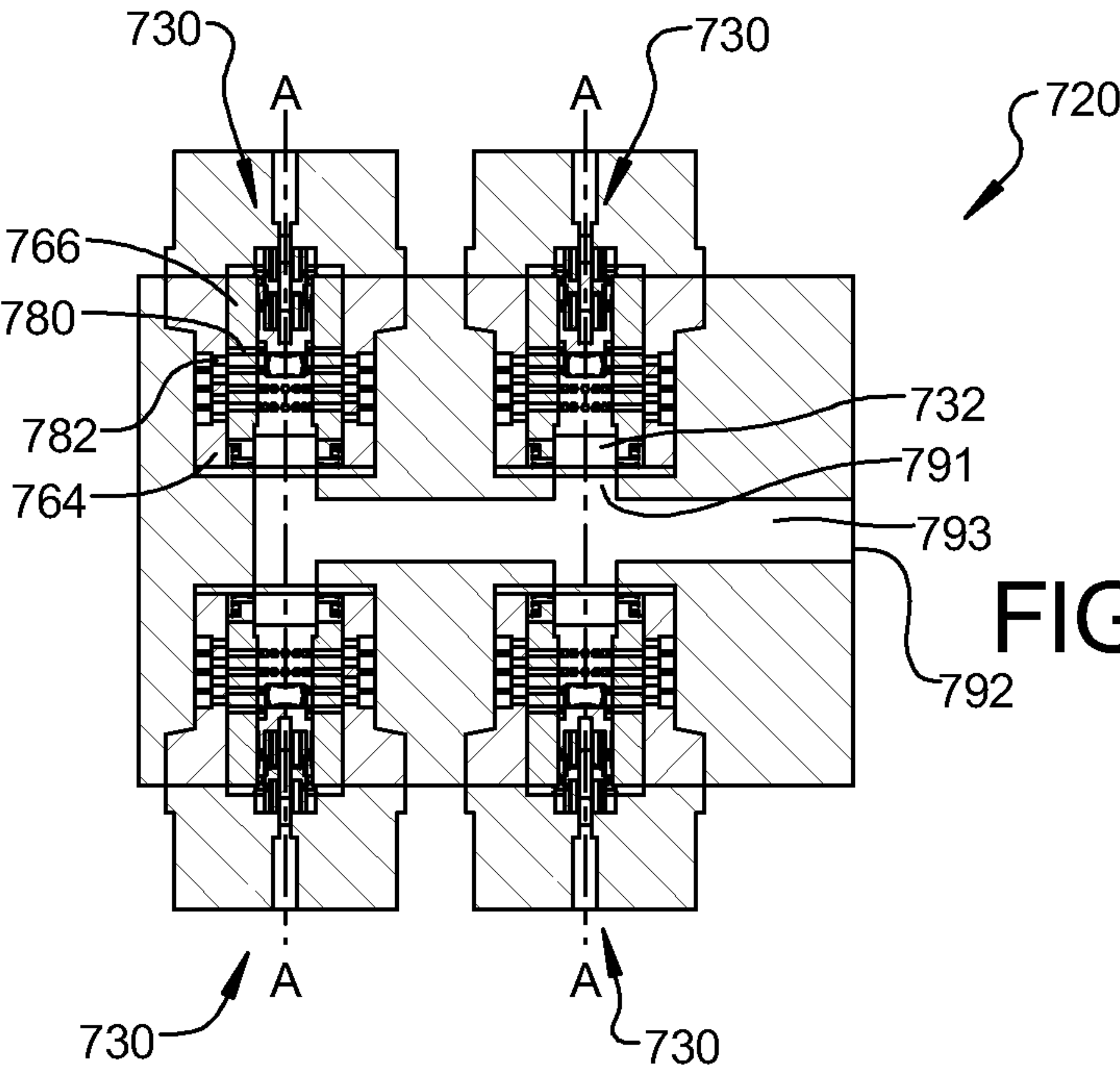


FIG 7A



PILOT VALVE ARRANGED EXTERNALLY ALONGSIDE THE MAIN-STAGE VALVE

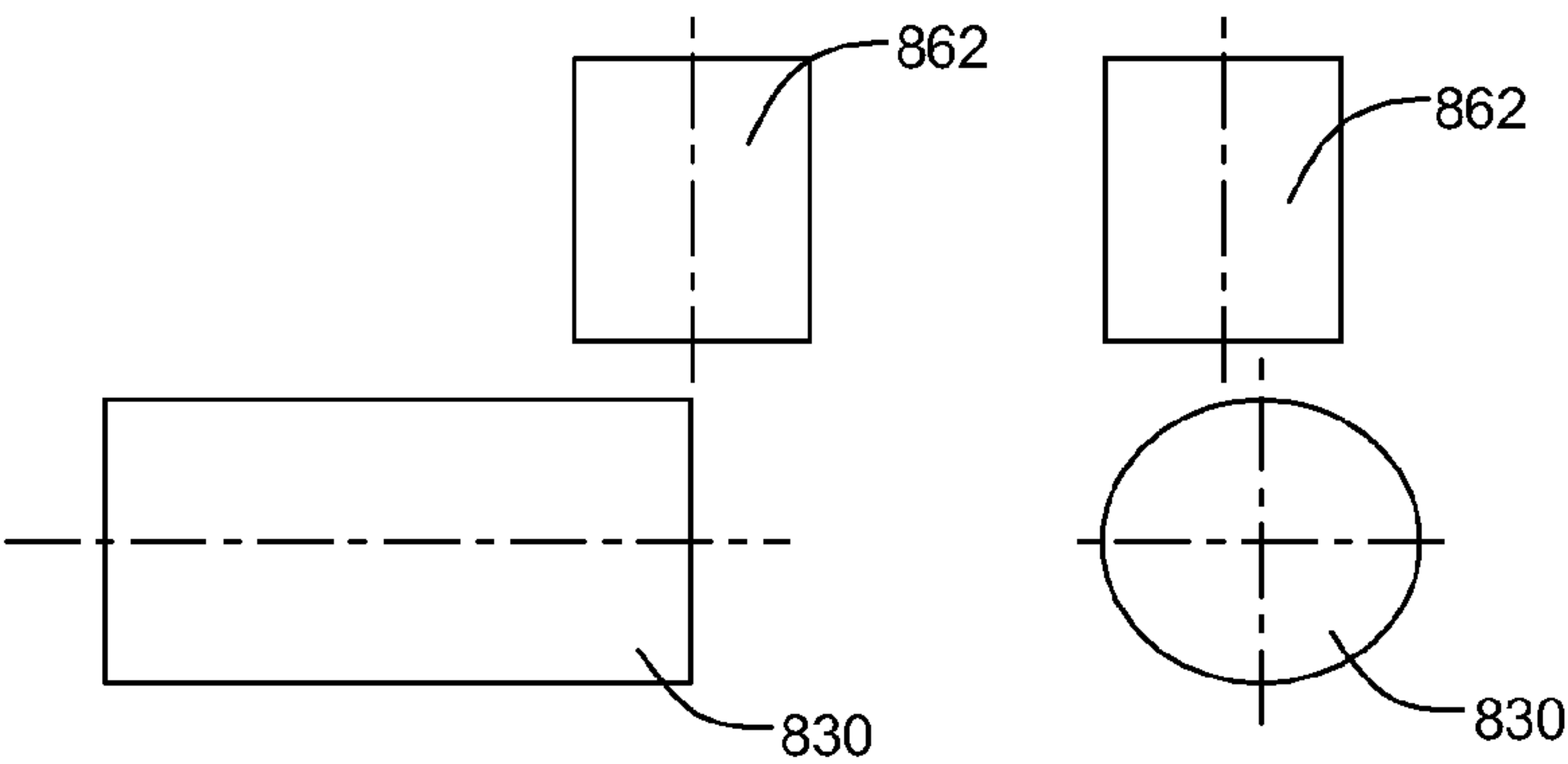


FIG 8

PILOT VALVE ARRANGED EXTERNALLY ON THE END OF THE MAIN-STAGE VALVE

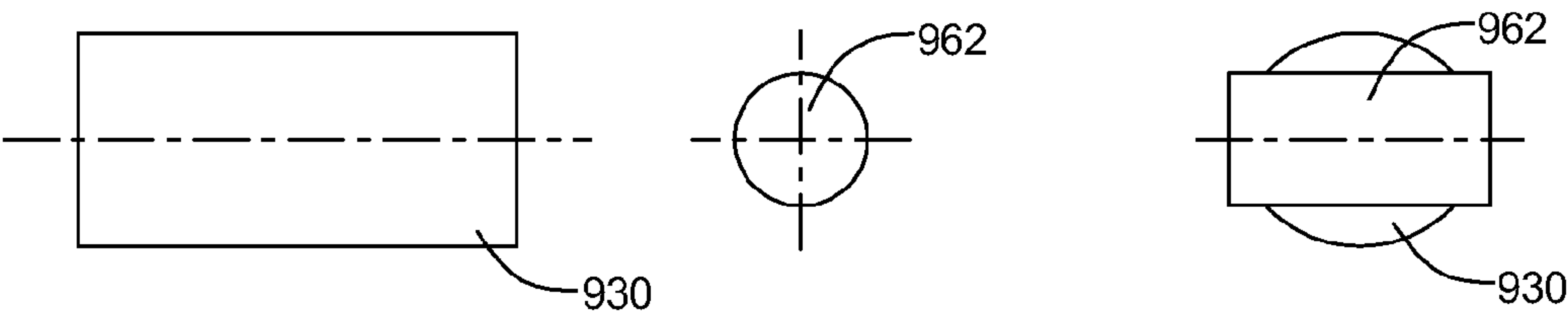


FIG 9

PILOT VALVE ARRANGED INTERNALLY TO THE MAIN-STAGE VALVE

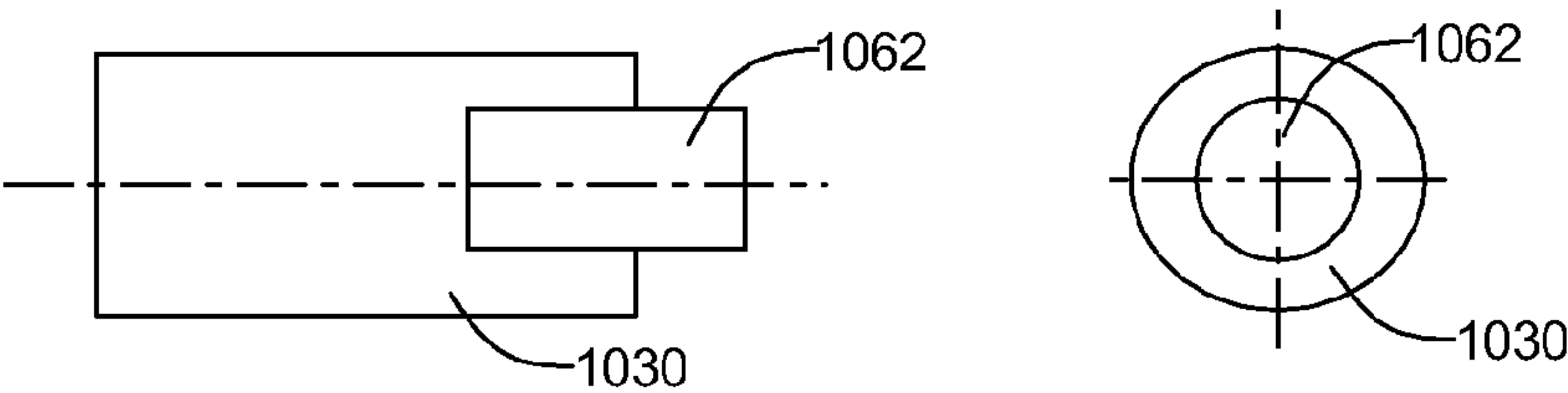
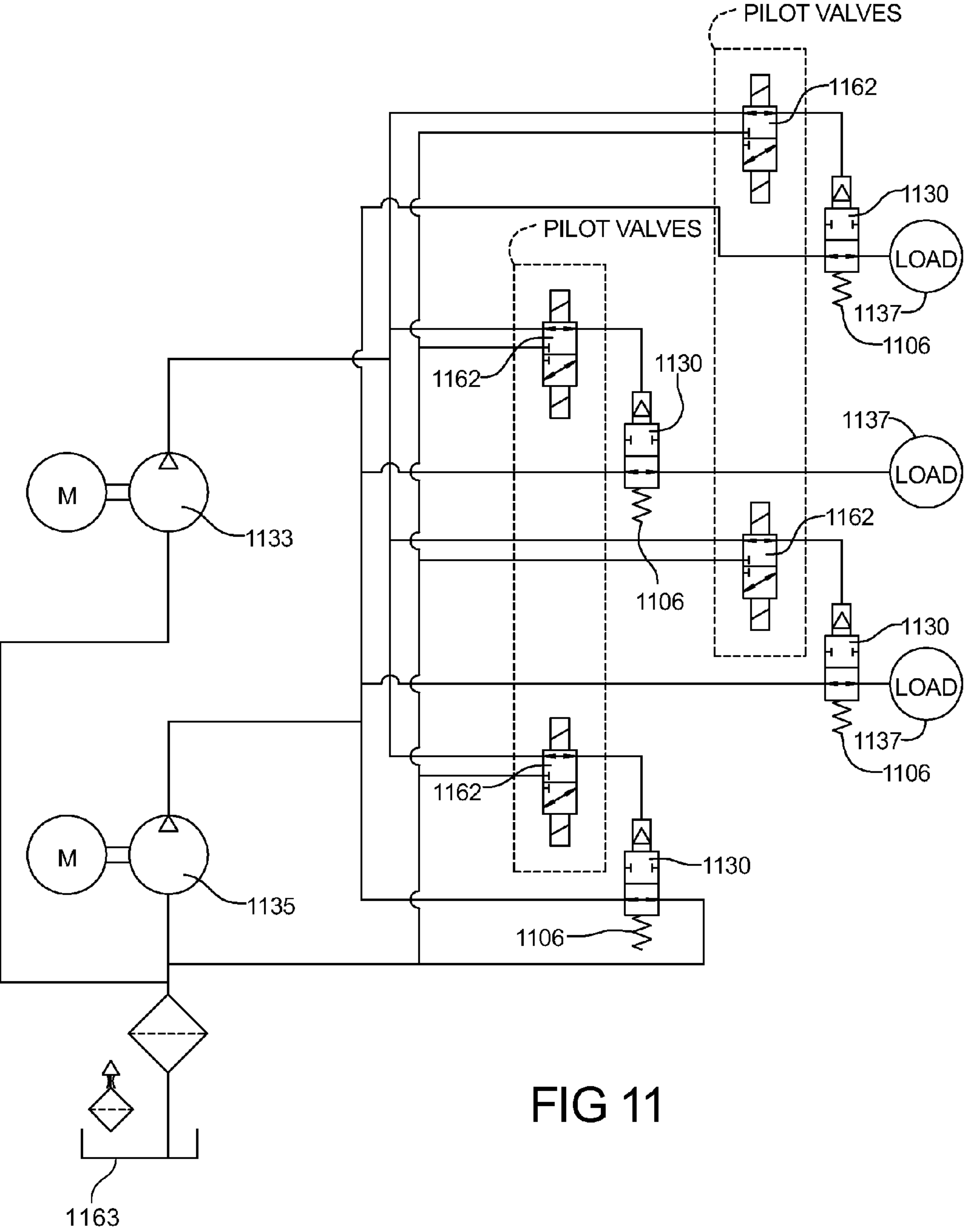


FIG 10



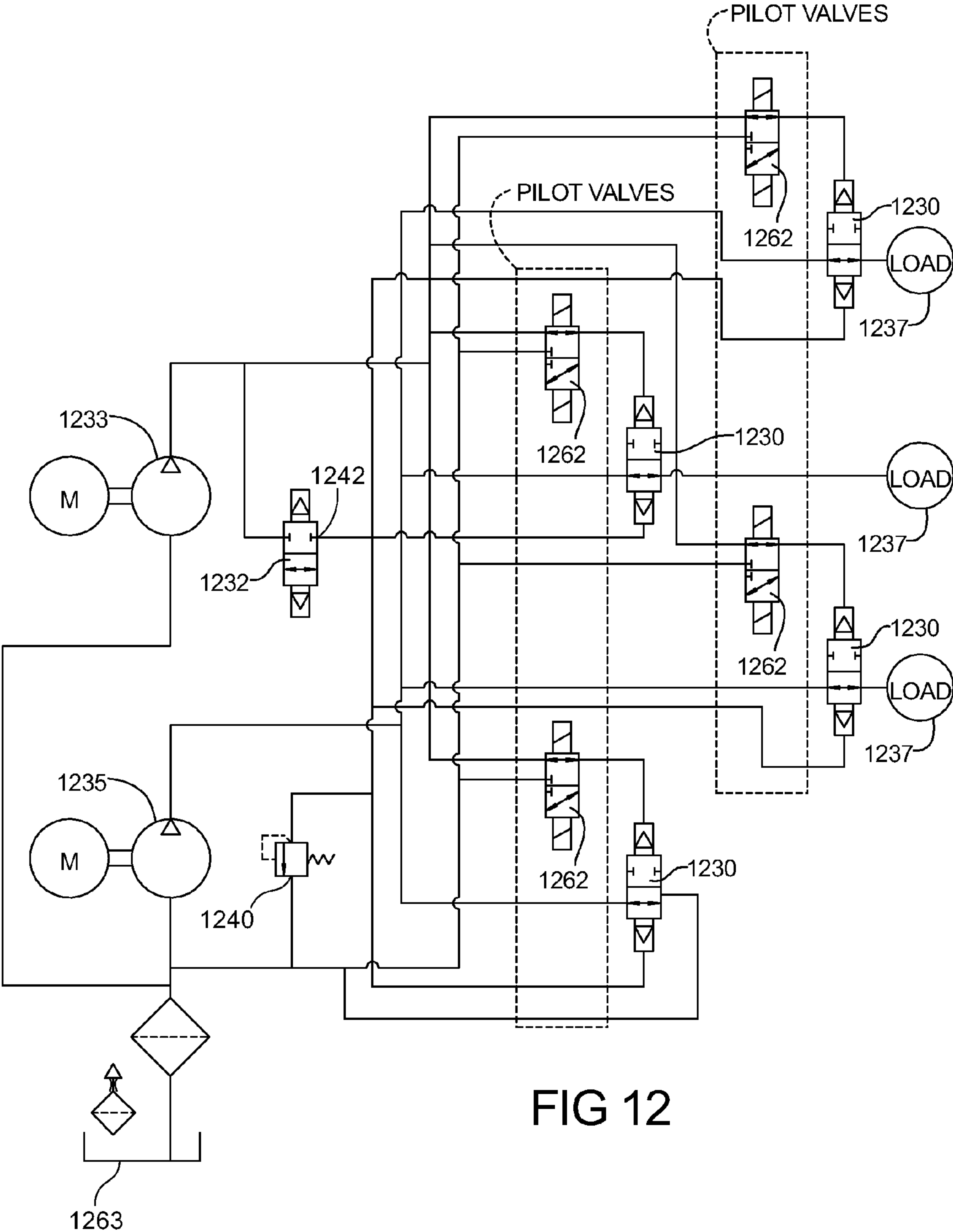


FIG 12

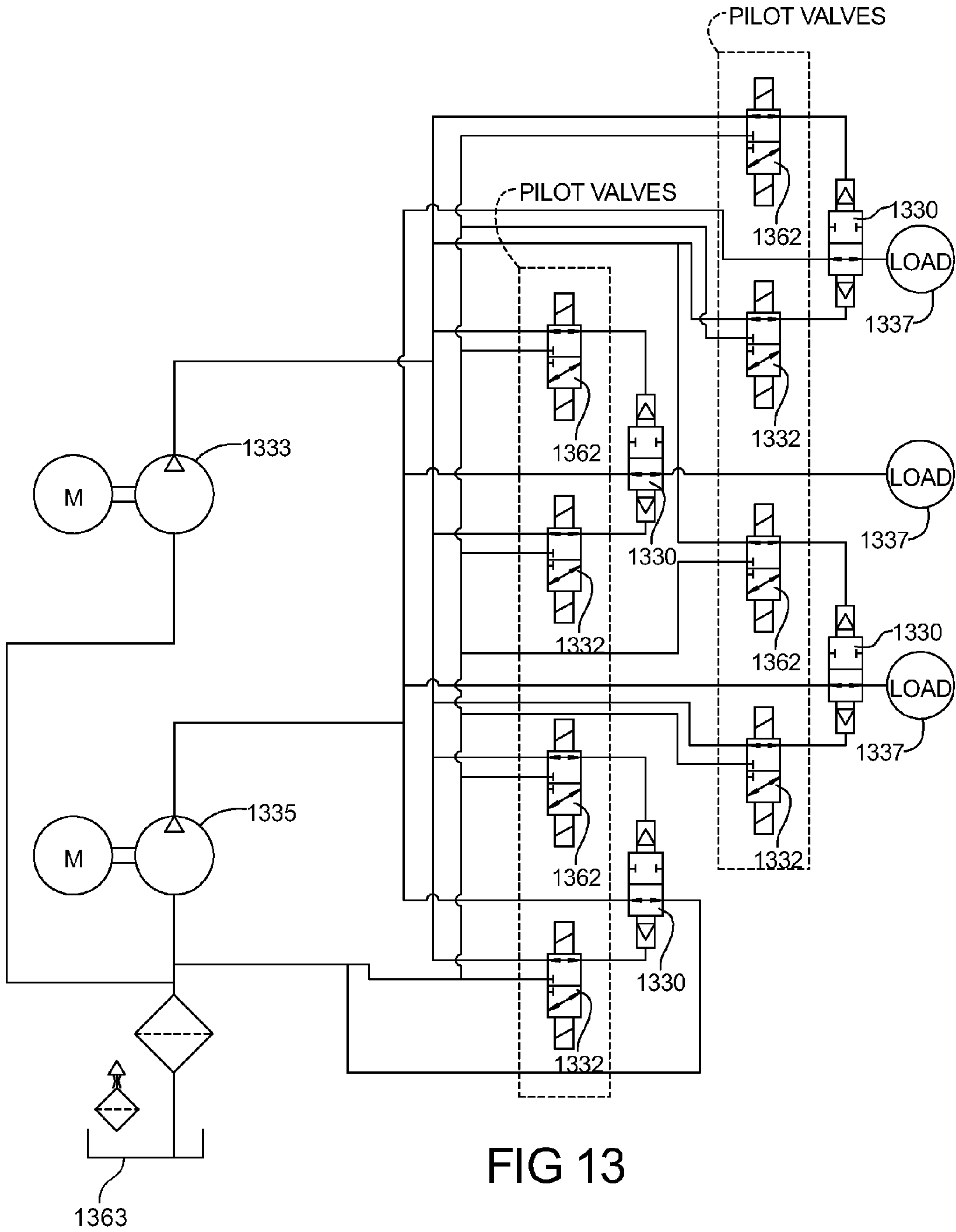


FIG 13

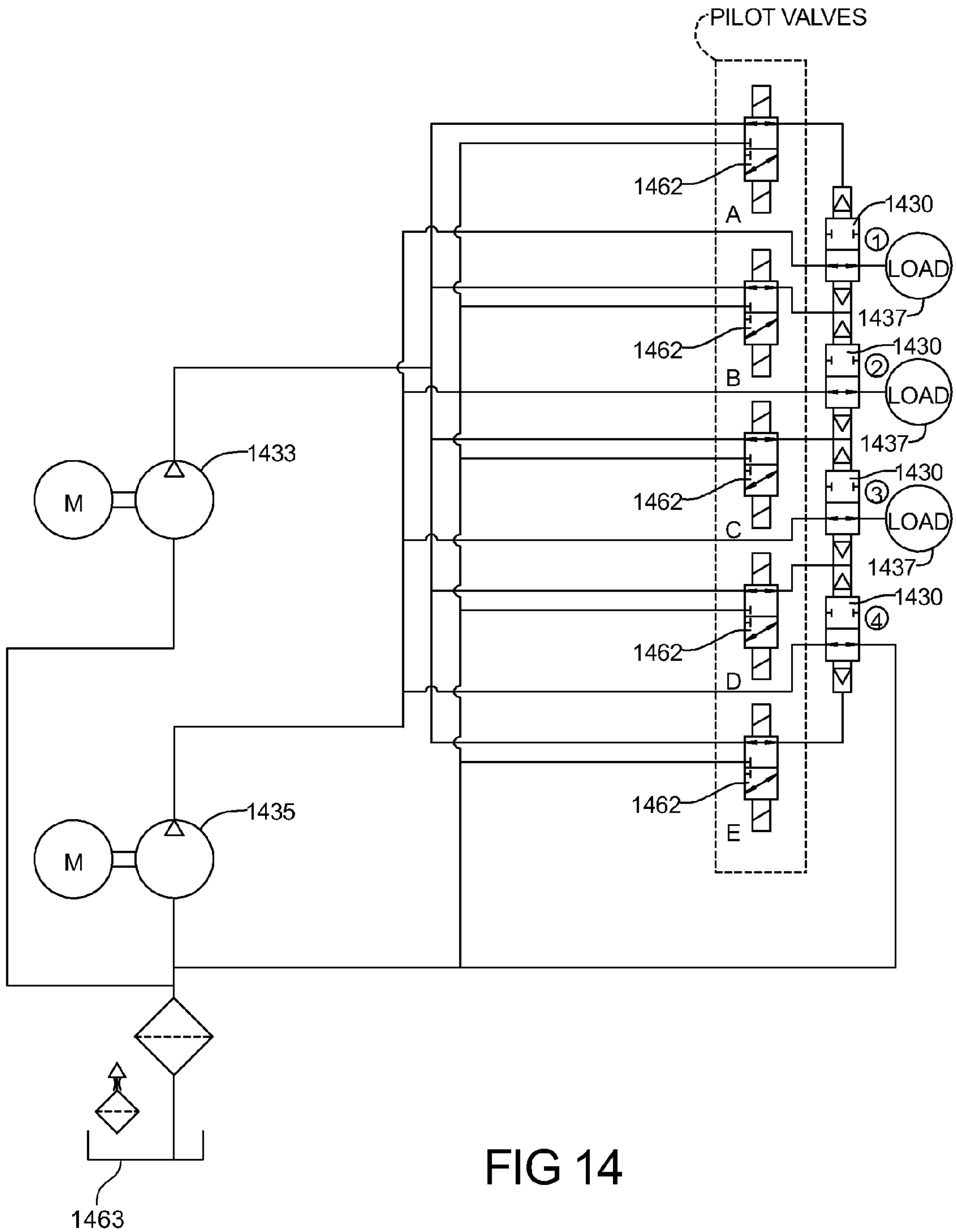


TABLE #2

A "0" MEANS THE VALVE IS SHUTTING OFF FLUID FLOW OR DUMPING PRESSURE TO DRAIN

A "1" MEANS THE VALVE IS FLOWING FLUID OR THERE IS PRESSURE SUPPLIED

| CONFIG. | PILOT VALVE POSITION | | | | | MAINSTAGE VALVE POSITION | | | |
|---------|----------------------|---|---|---|---|--------------------------|---|---|---|
| | A | B | C | D | E | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

FIG 17

TABLE #1

A "0" MEANS THE VALVE IS SHUTTING OFF FLUID FLOW OR DUMPING PRESSURE TO DRAIN

A "1" MEANS THE VALVE IS FLOWING FLUID OR THERE IS PRESSURE SUPPLIED

A "LC" MEANS THE VALVE FLOWING STAGE DEPENDS ON THE LAST CONDITION IN WHICH THE SPECIFIED MAINSTAGE ACTUATORS WERE EXPOSED

| CONFIG. | PILOT VALVE POSITION | | | | | MAINSTAGE VALVE POSITION | | | |
|---------|----------------------|---|---|---|---|--------------------------|----|----|----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | LC | LC | LC |
| 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | LC | LC |
| 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | LC | 0 | 1 | LC |
| 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | LC | LC | 0 | 1 |
| 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | LC | LC | LC | 0 |
| 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | LC | LC | LC | LC |

FIG 15

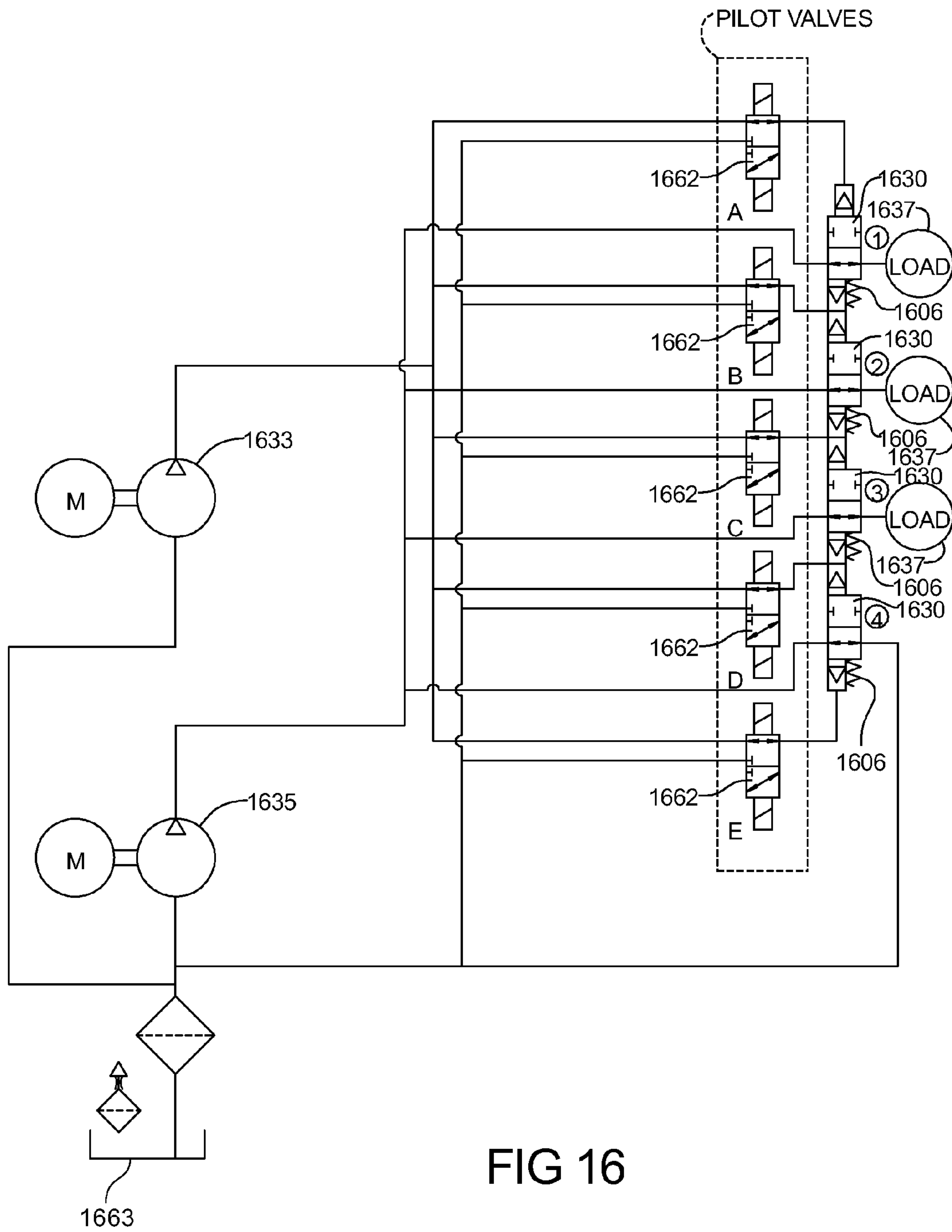


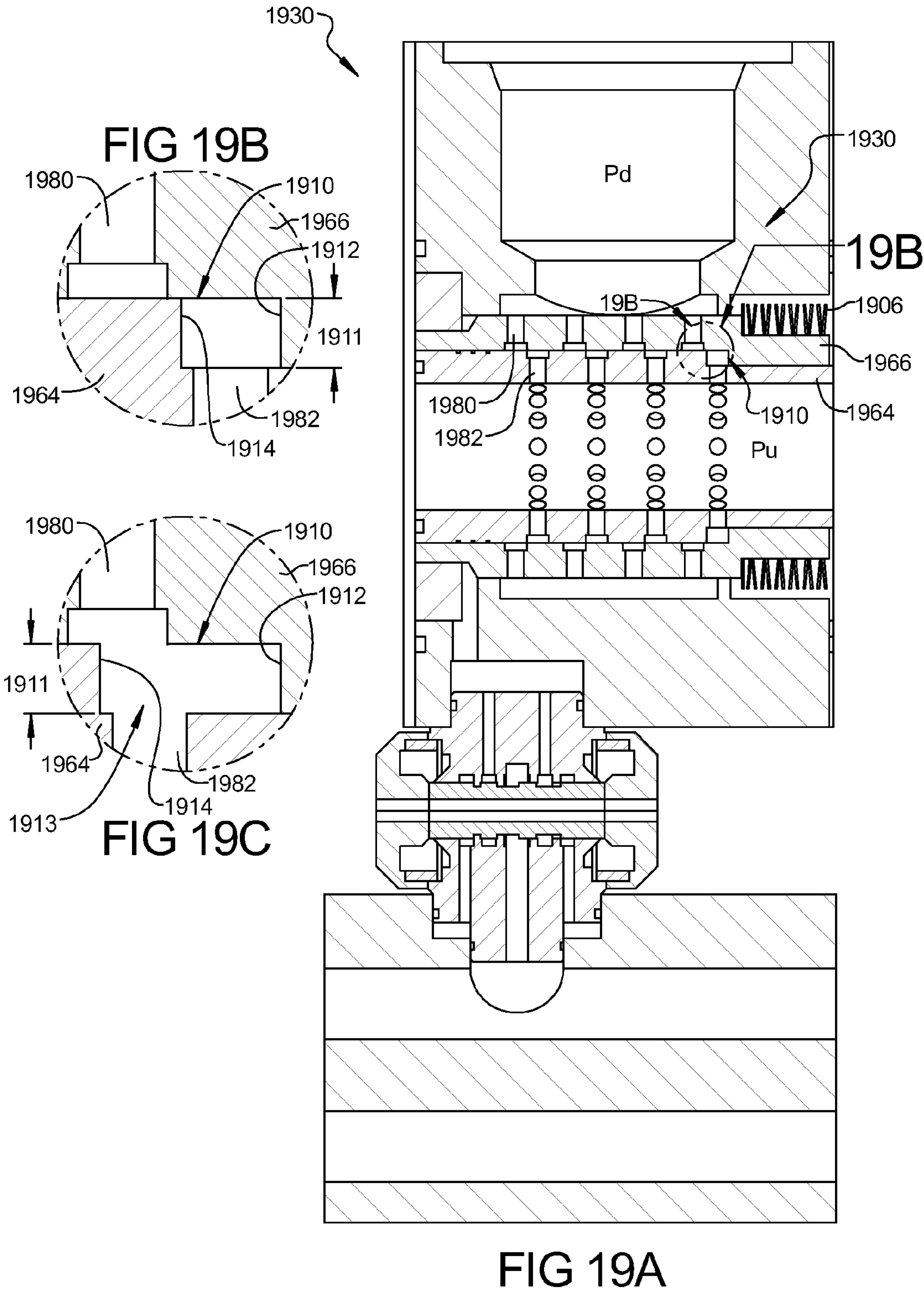
TABLE #3

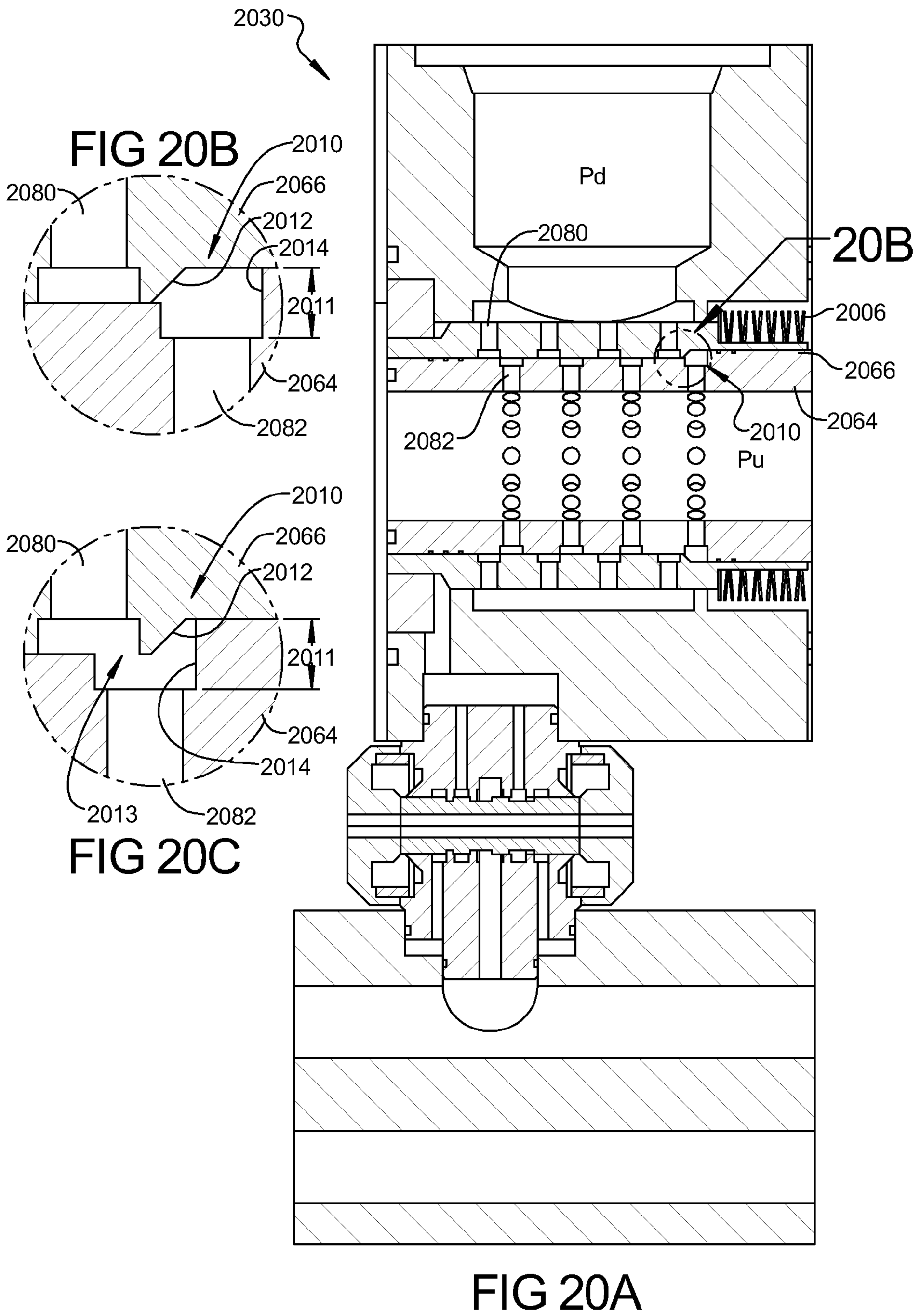
| CONFIG. | PILOT VALVE POSITION | | | | | MAINSTAGE VALVE POSITION | | | |
|---------|----------------------|---|---|---|---|--------------------------|---|---|---|
| | A | B | C | D | E | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 6 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 8 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 9 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 10 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 12 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 13 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 14 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 16 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 17 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 18 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| 19 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 20 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 21 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 22 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| 23 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 24 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 25 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 26 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

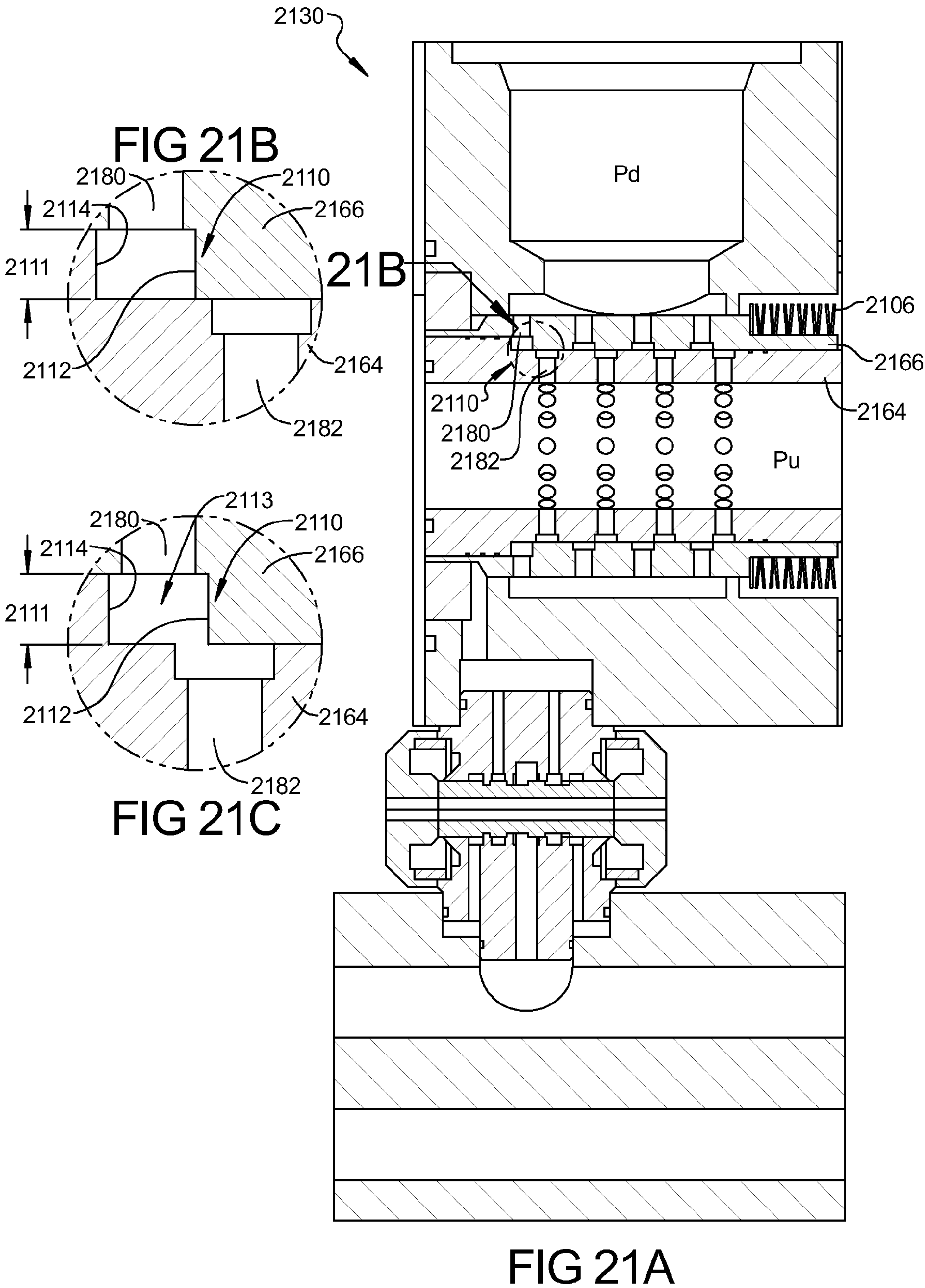
FIG 18a

| CONFIG. | PILOT VALVE POSITION | | | | | MAINSTAGE VALVE POSITION | | | |
|---------|----------------------|---|---|---|---|--------------------------|---|---|---|
| | A | B | C | D | E | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 27 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 28 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 29 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 30 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| 31 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 32 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 33 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 34 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| 35 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 36 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 37 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 38 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| 39 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 40 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 41 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 42 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| 43 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 44 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 45 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 46 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| 47 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 48 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 49 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 50 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 51 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 52 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

FIG 18b







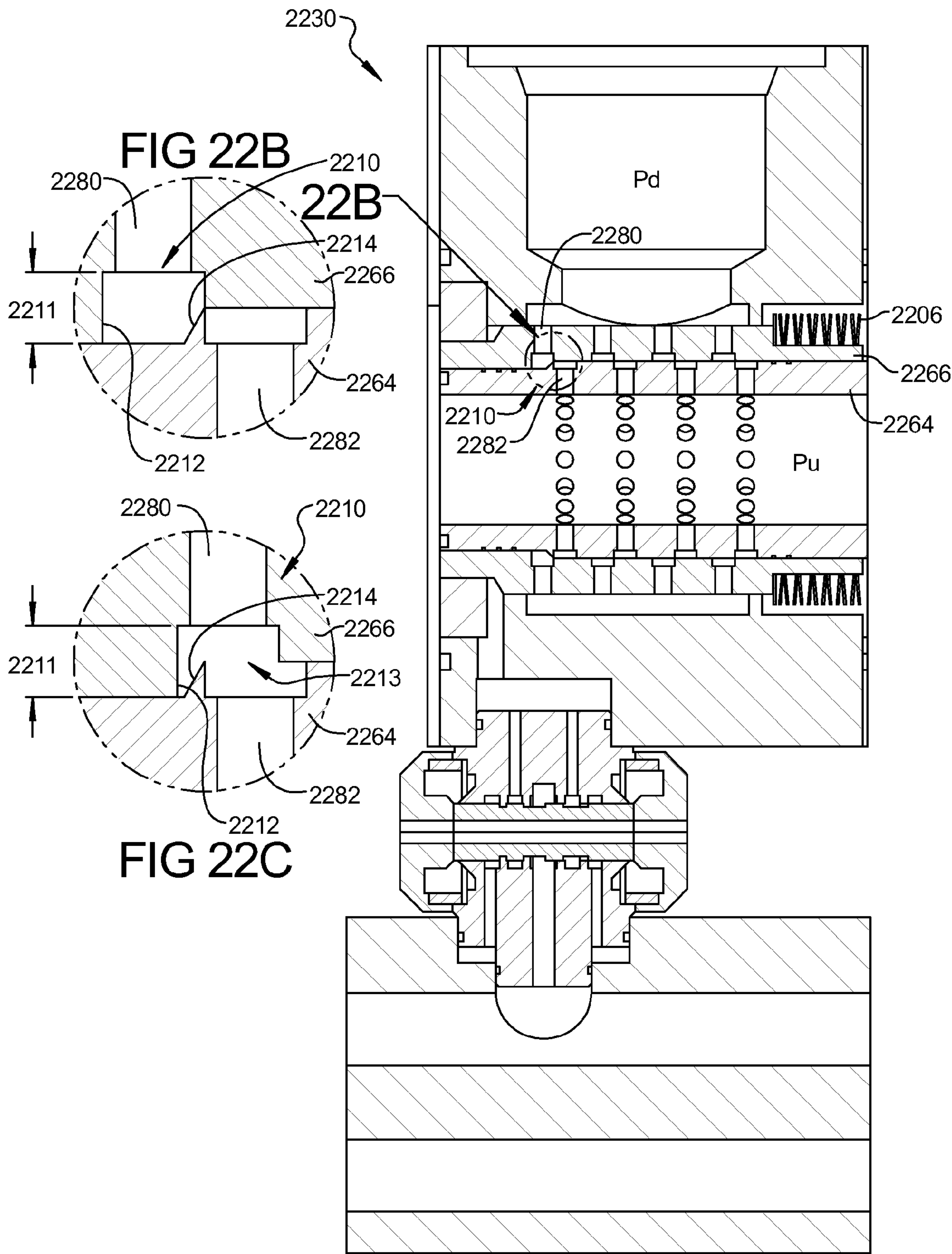


FIG 22A

FIG 23

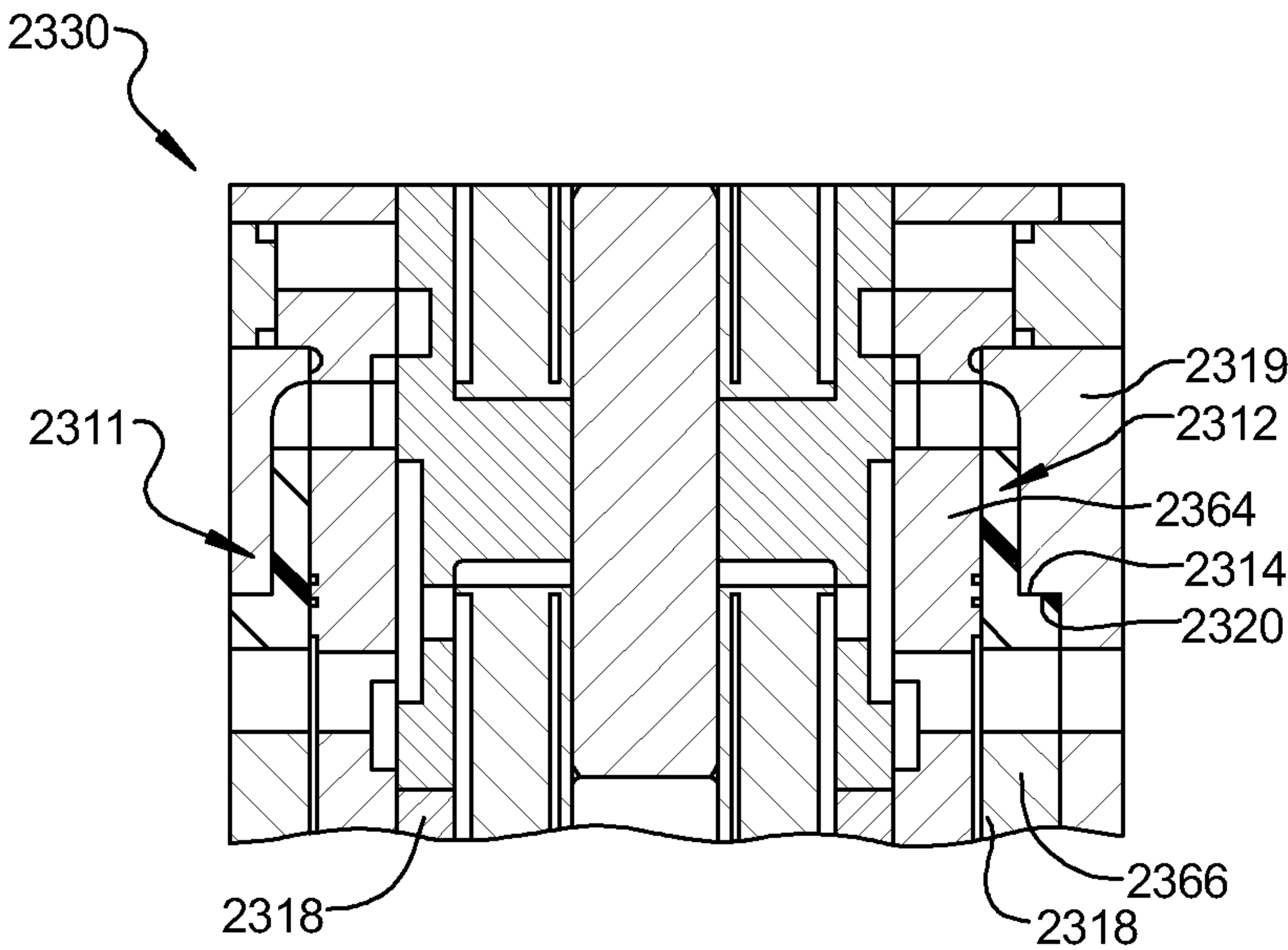
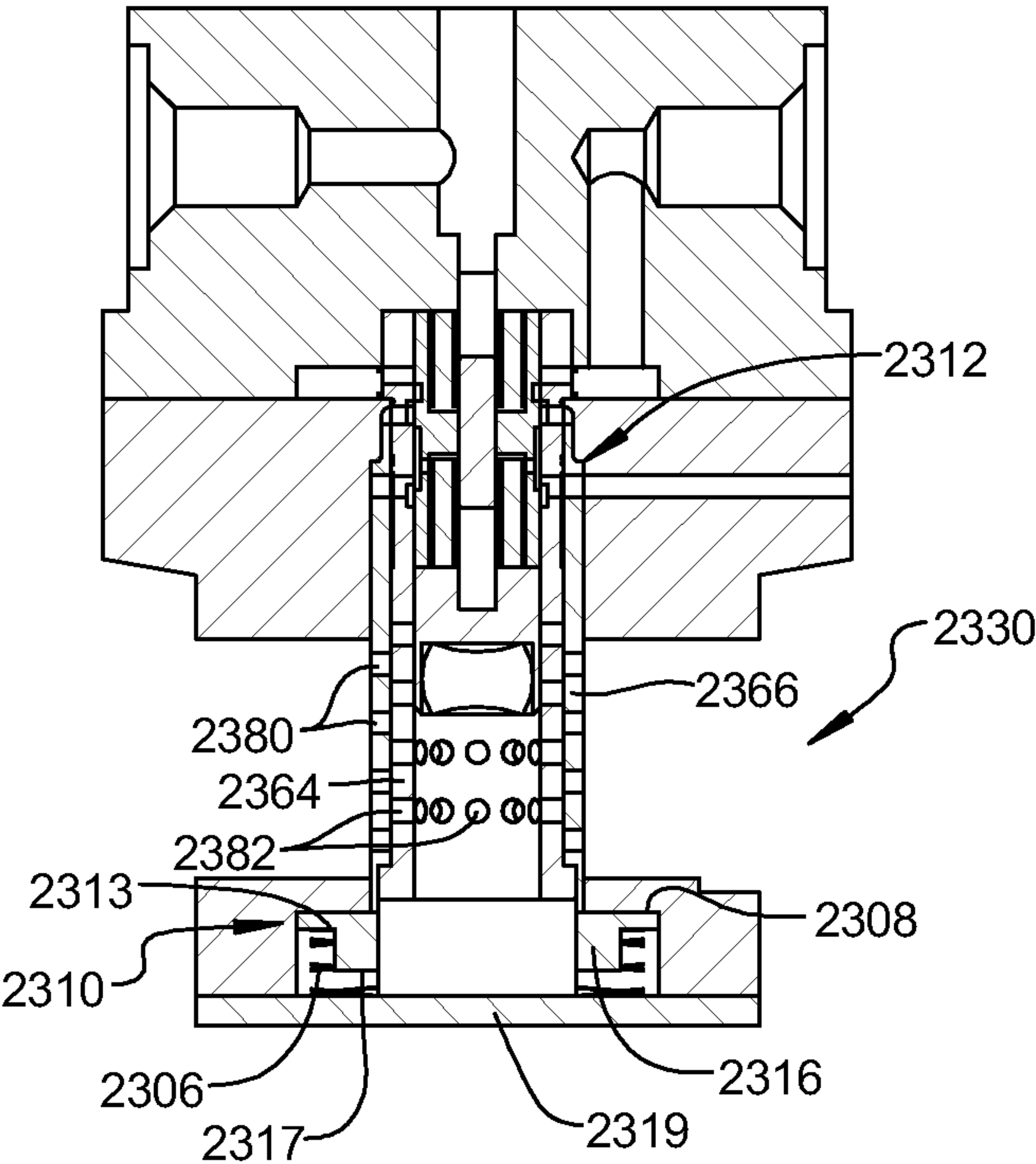


FIG 24

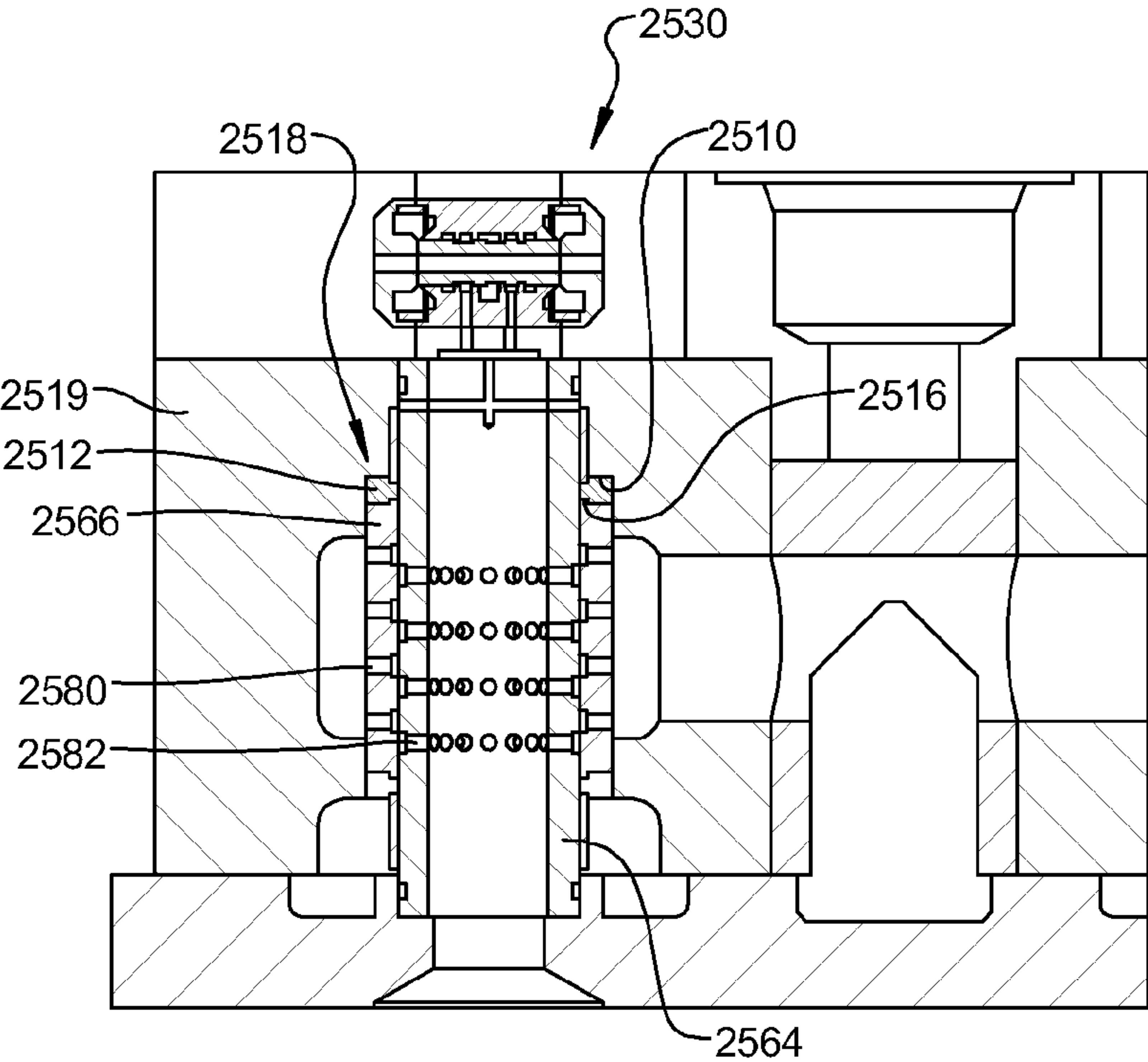


FIG 25A

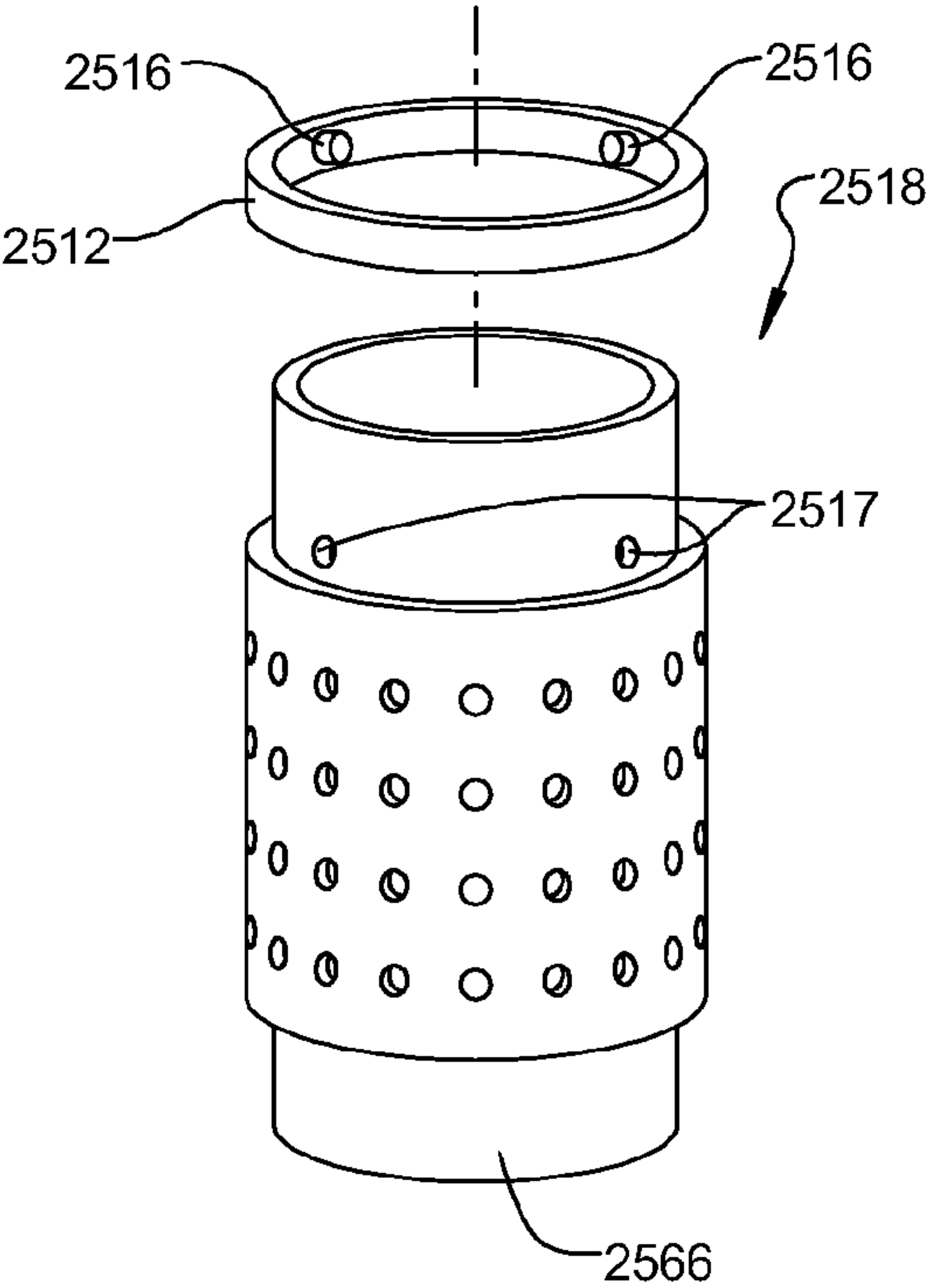


FIG 25B

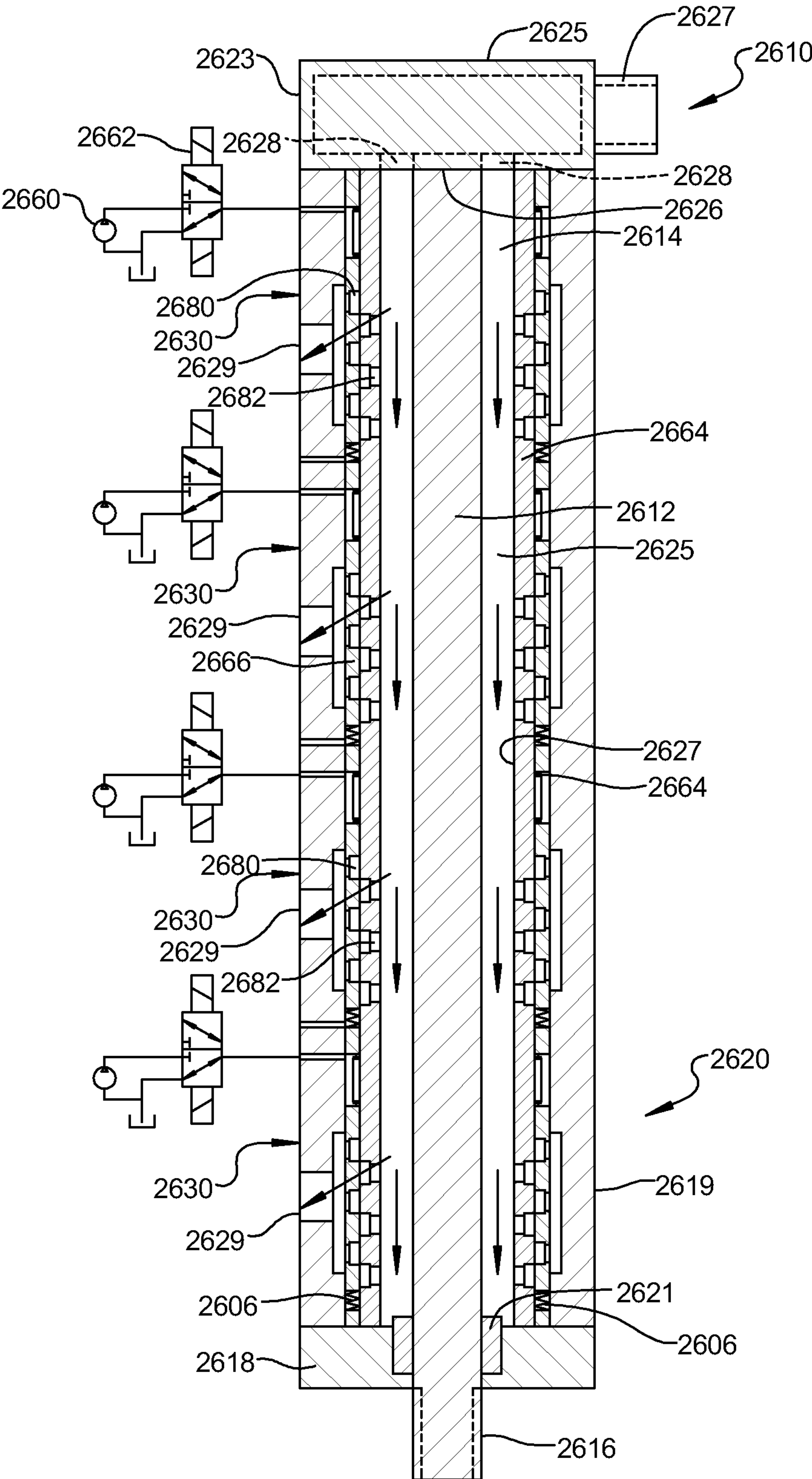


FIG 26

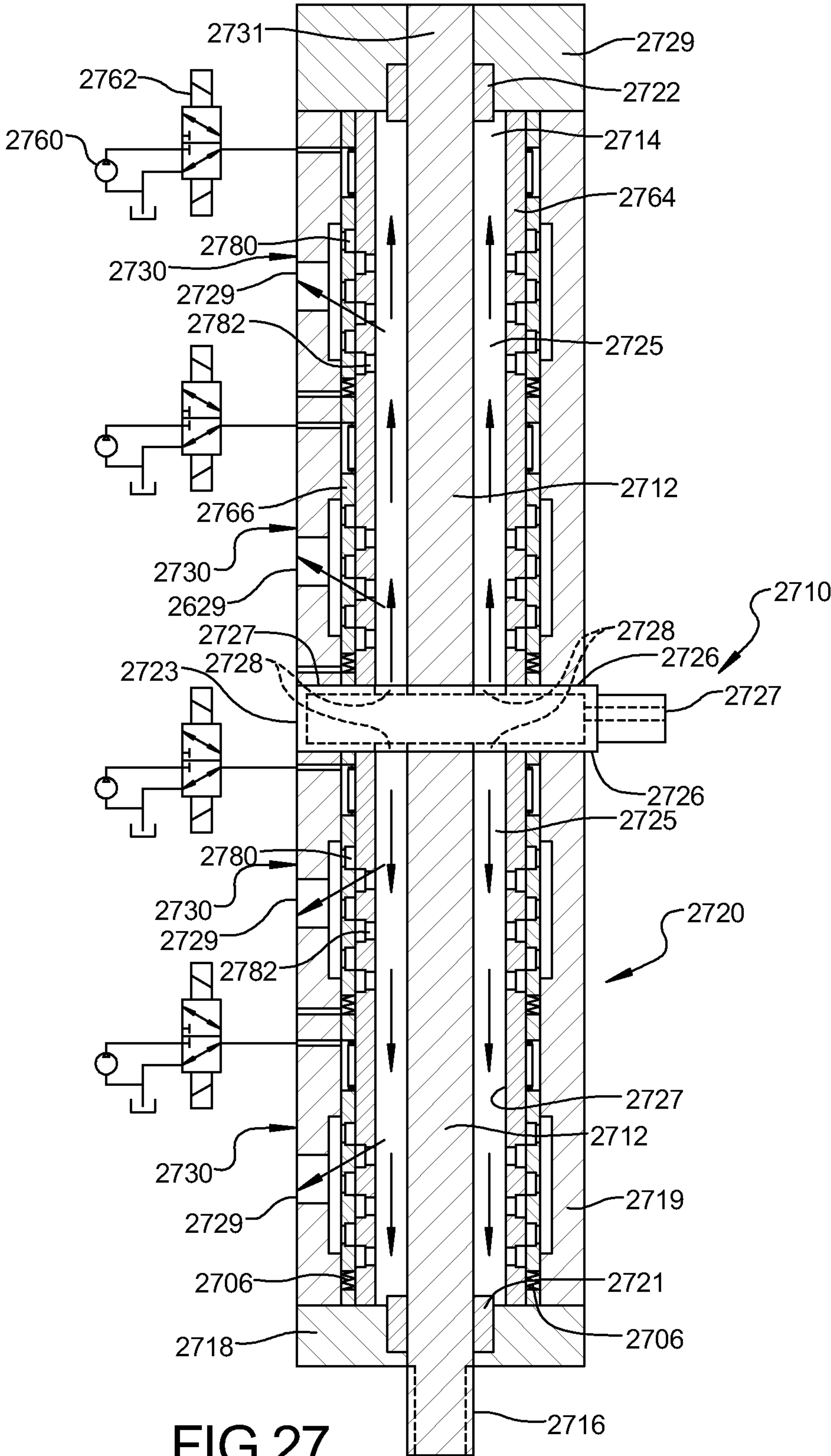
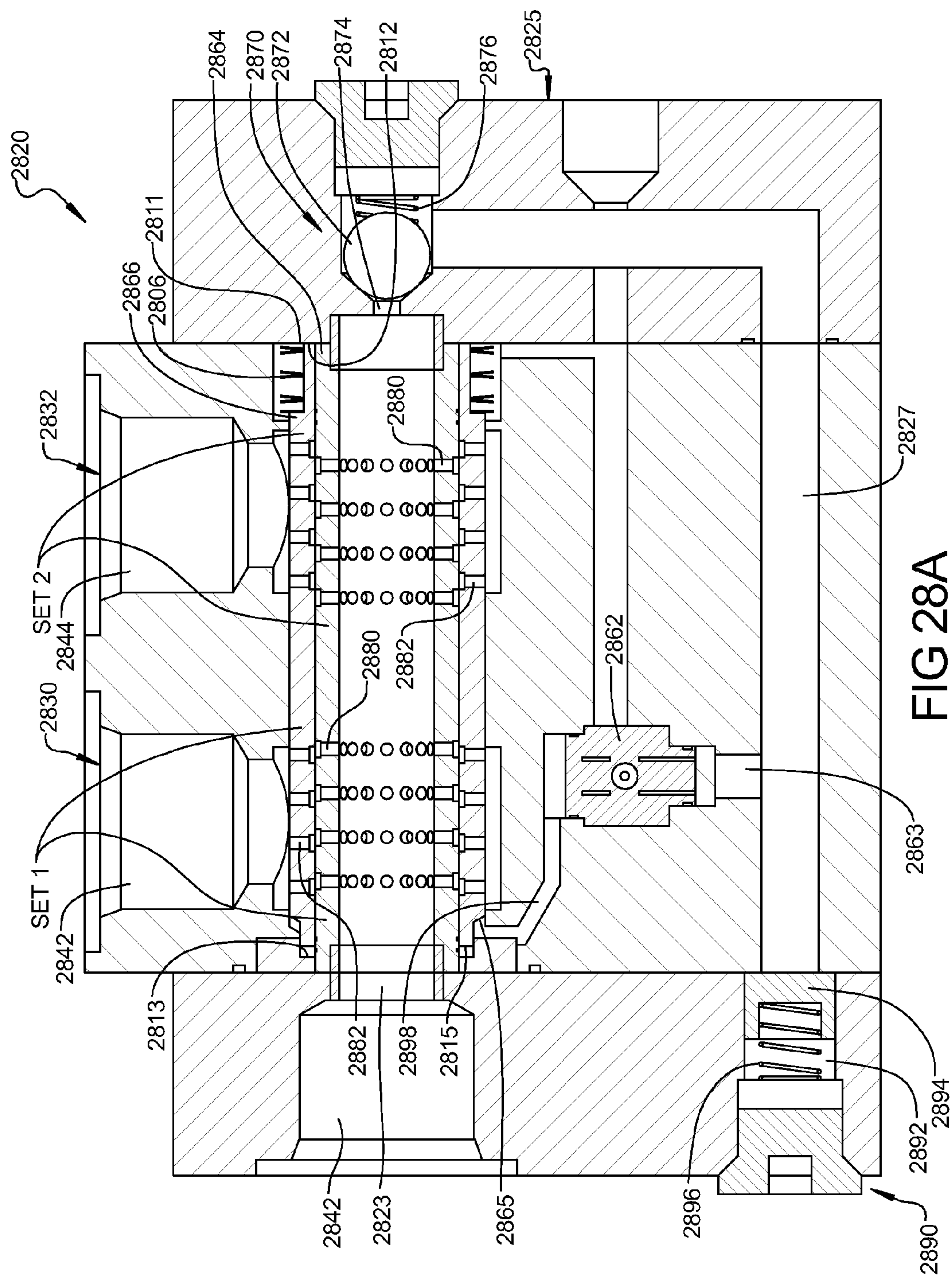
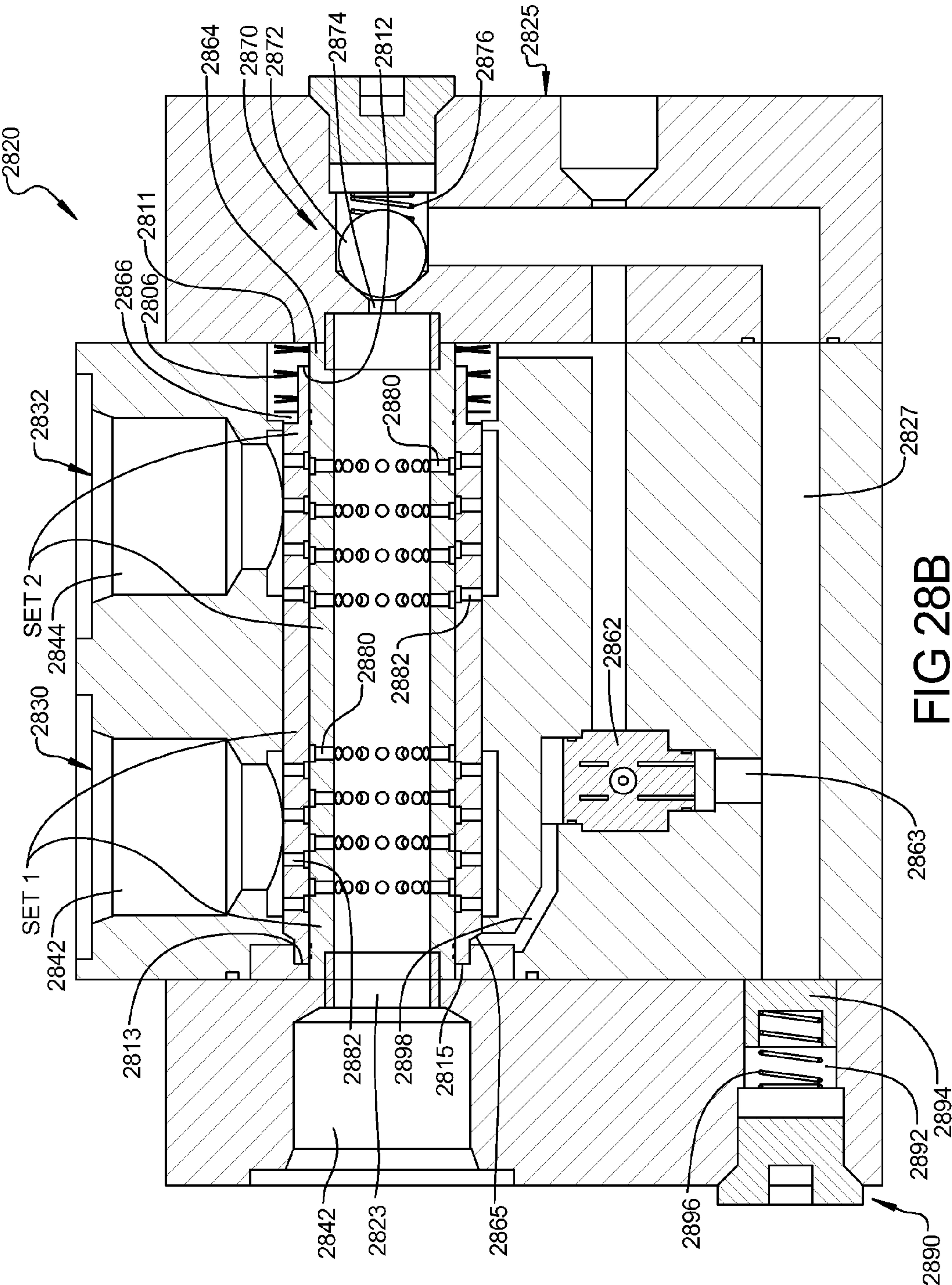


FIG 27





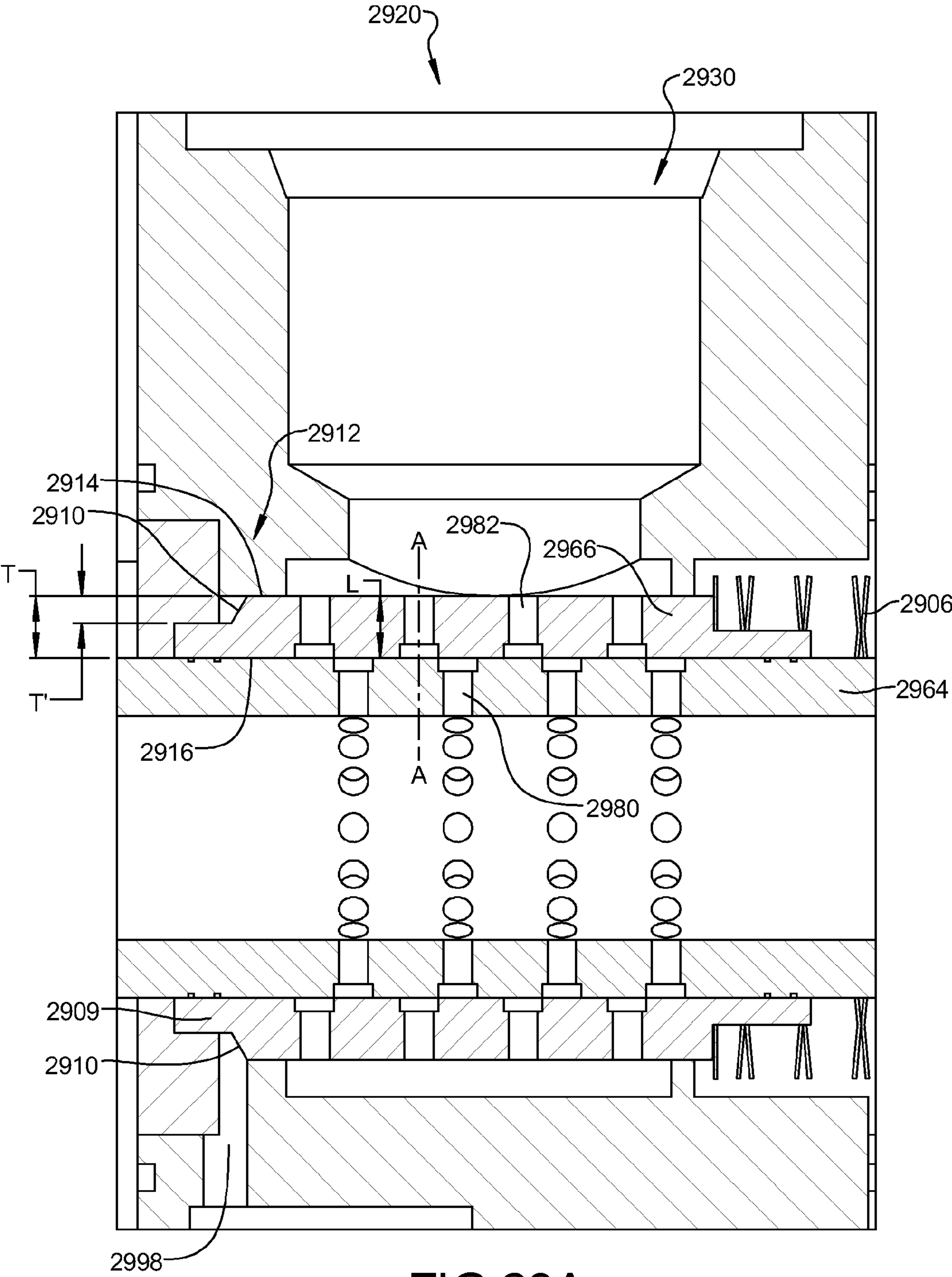


FIG 29A

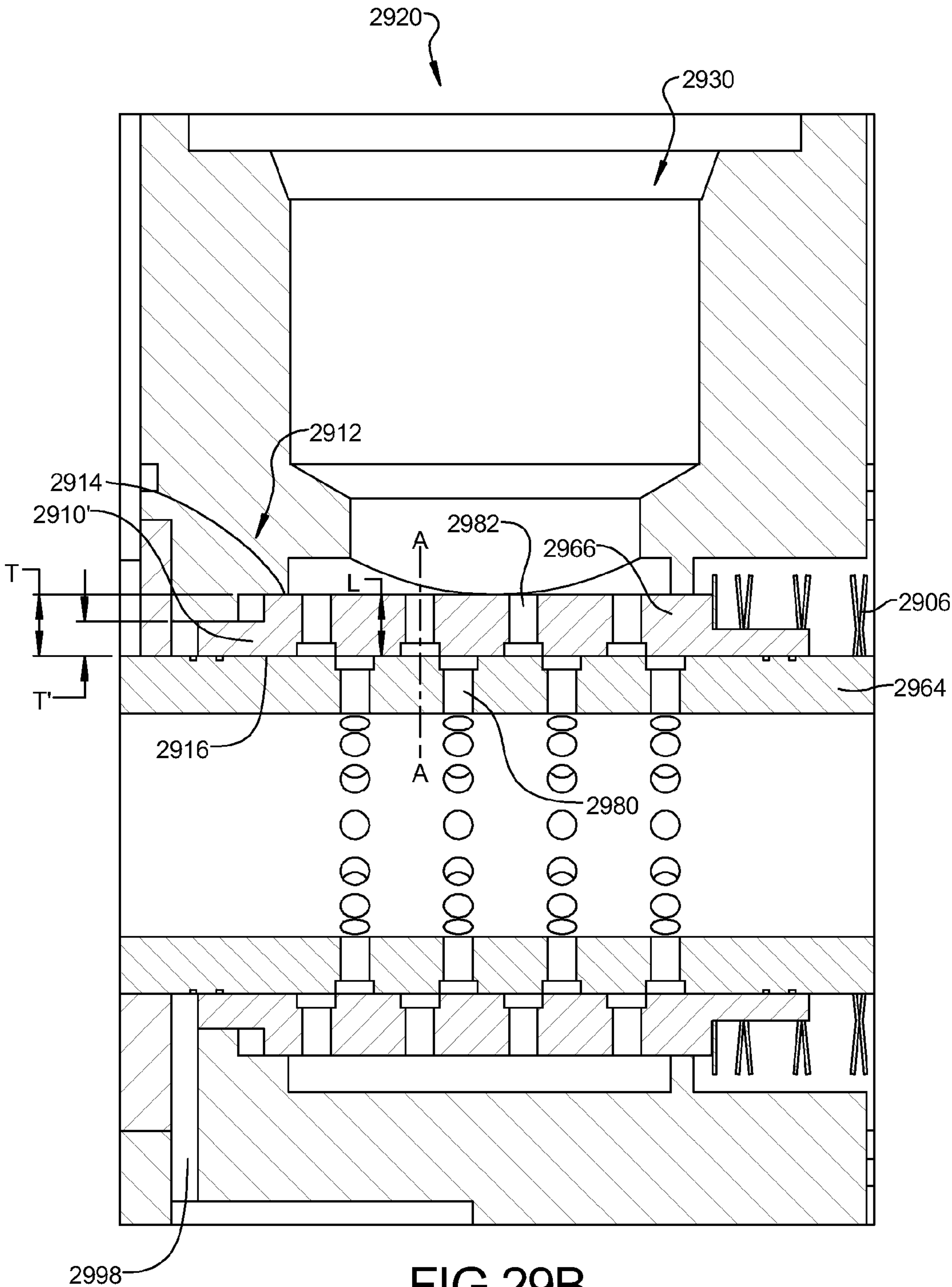
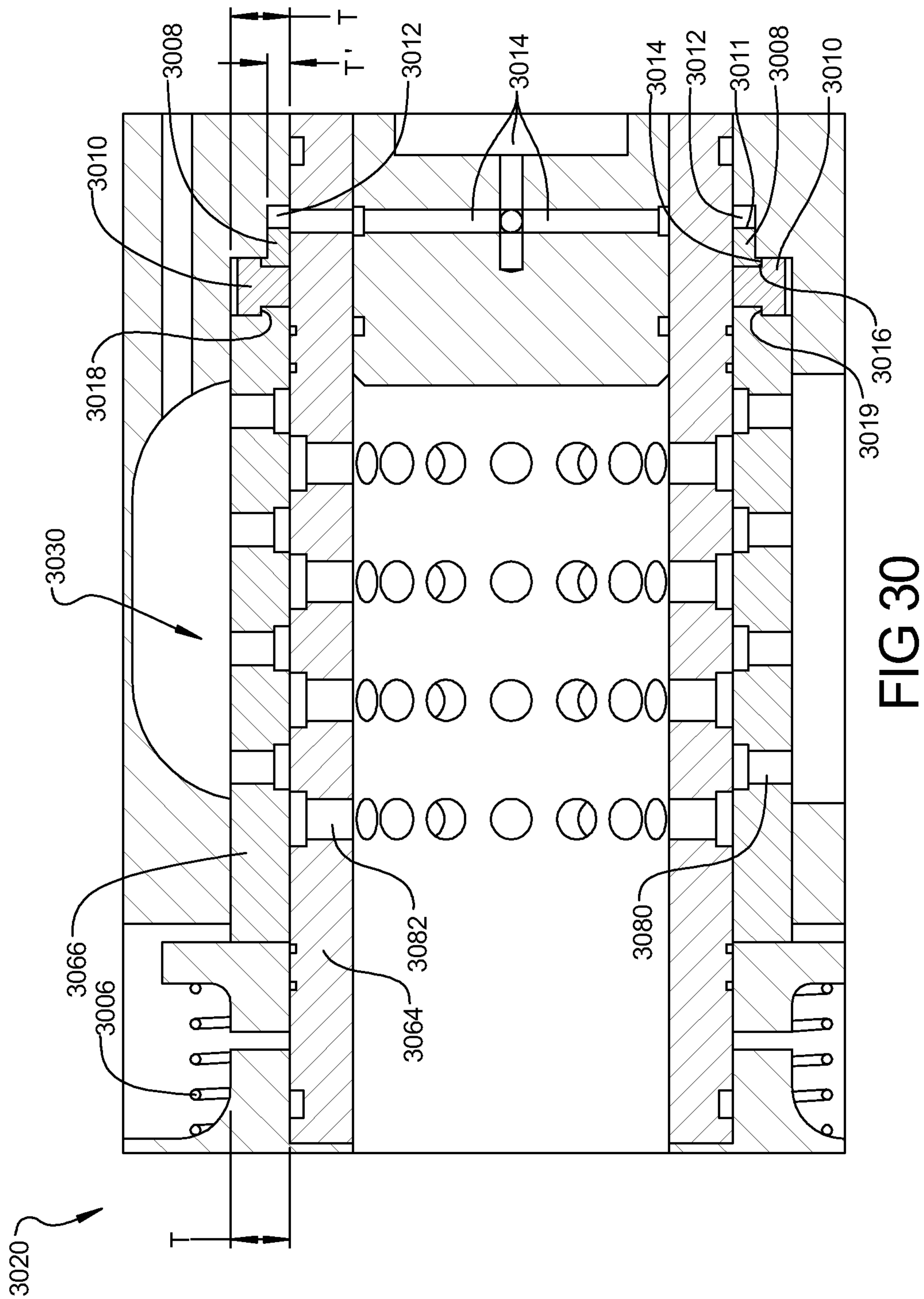
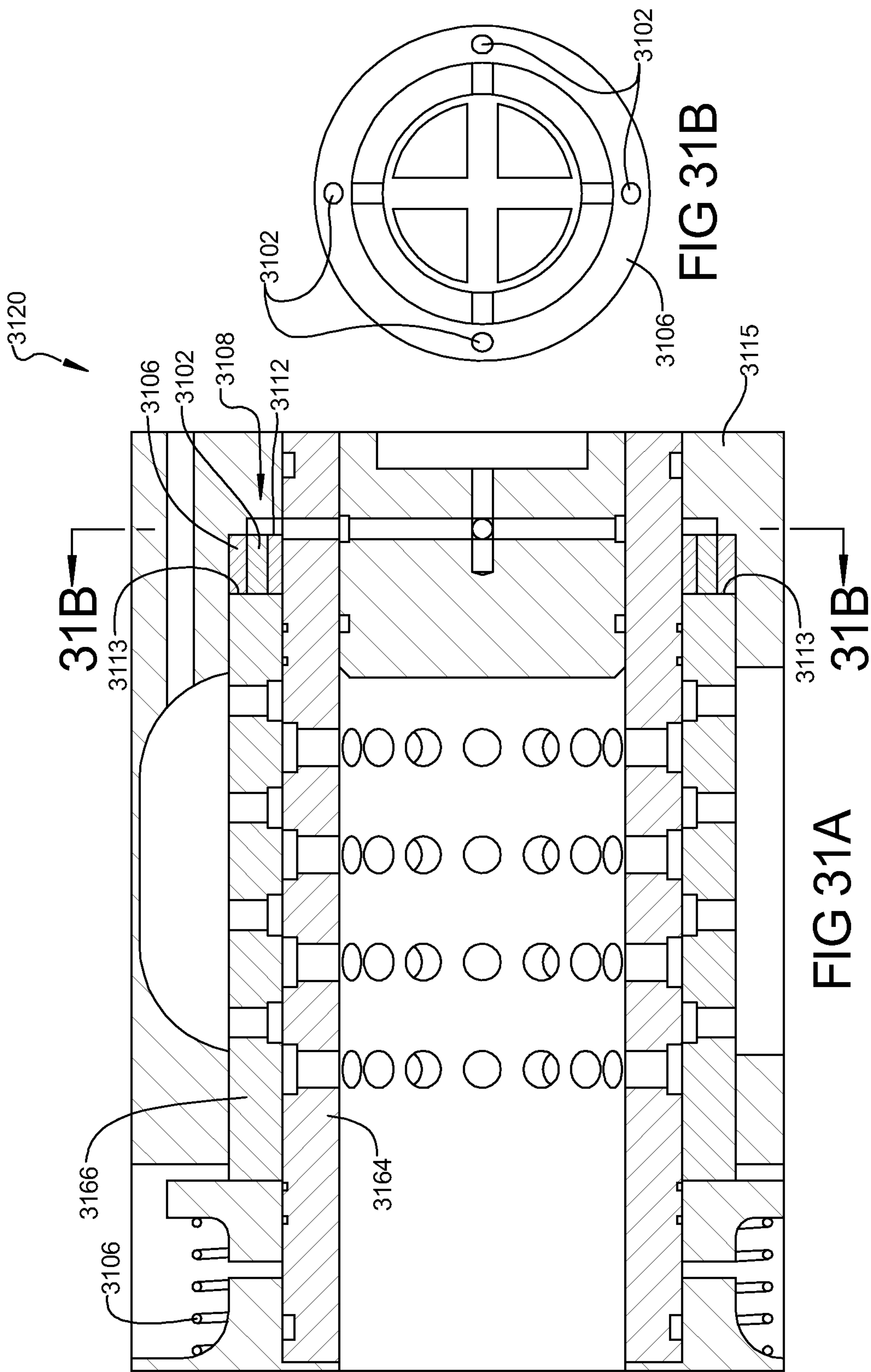
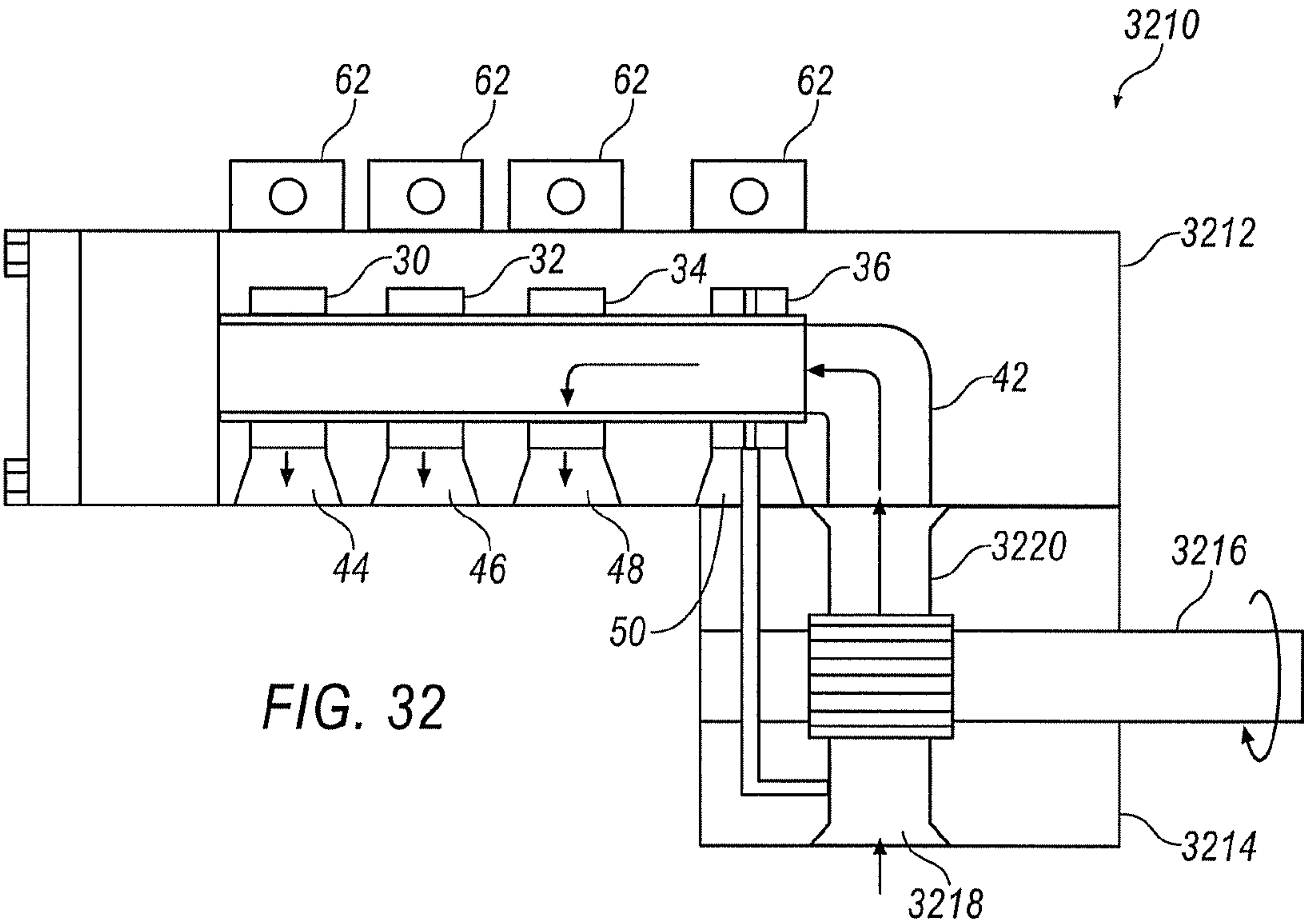


FIG 29B







1

VALVE HAVING INTEGRATED PRESSURE
ASSIST MECHANISMCROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED
APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority to U.S. provisional patent application 61/058,083, filed Jun. 2, 2008, which is incorporated by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND

A hydraulic system may include multiple hydraulic loads, each of which may have different flow and pressure requirements that can vary over time. The hydraulic system may include a pump for supplying a flow of pressurized fluid to the hydraulic loads. The pump may have a variable or fixed displacement configuration. Fixed displacement pumps are often smaller, lighter, and less expensive than variable displacement pumps. Generally, fixed displacement pumps deliver a definite volume of fluid for each cycle of pump operation. The output volume of a fixed displacement pump can be controlled by adjusting the speed of the pump. Closing or otherwise restricting the outlet of a fixed displacement pump will cause a corresponding increase in the system pressure. To avoid over pressurizing the hydraulic system, fixed displacement pumps typically utilize a pressure regulator or an unloading valve to control the pressure level within the system during periods in which the pump output exceeds the flow requirements of the multiple hydraulic loads. The hydraulic system may further include various valves for controlling the distribution of the pressurized fluid to the multiple loads.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1A is a side cross-sectional view of an exemplary valve manifold including a main-stage manifold and a pilot valve manifold.

FIG. 1B is an enlarged view of a portion of the main-stage manifold in FIG. 1A.

FIG. 1C is an enlarged view of a portion of the main-stage manifold in FIG. 1A.

FIG. 2A is an illustration of an exemplary main-stage manifold employing multiple main-stage valves arranged in a co-parallel configuration.

FIG. 2B is a schematic illustration of the co-parallel valve configuration in FIG. 2A.

FIG. 3A is an illustration of exemplary main-stage manifold employing multiple main-stage valves arranged in a radial configuration.

FIG. 3B is a schematic illustration of the radial valve configuration in FIG. 3A.

FIG. 4 is a schematic illustration of the collinear valve configuration in FIG. 1A.

FIG. 5 is a schematic representation of an exemplary main-stage manifold employing multiple main-stage valves arranged in a split collinear configuration.

FIG. 6A is an illustration of an exemplary main-stage manifold employing multiple main-stage valves arranged in an annular configuration.

FIG. 6B is a schematic illustration of the annular valve configuration in FIG. 6A.

FIG. 7A is an exemplary main-stage manifold employing multiple main-stage valves arranged in a 2×2 co-axial configuration.

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FIG. 7B is a schematic illustration of the co-axial valve configuration in FIG. 7A.

FIG. 8 is a schematic representation of a valve assembly having a pilot valve arranged externally along a longitudinal side of the main-stage valve.

FIG. 9 is a schematic representation of a valve assembly having a pilot valve arranged externally adjacent an end of the main-stage valve.

FIG. 10 is a schematic representation of a valve assembly having a pilot valve arranged internally to the main-stage valve.

FIG. 11 is a schematic representation of an exemplary hydraulic system including multiple main-stage valves, each employing a pilot valve for opening the main-stage valve and a return spring for closing the main-stage valve.

FIG. 12 is a schematic representation of an exemplary hydraulic system including multiple main-stage valves, each employing a pilot valve for opening the main-stage valve and a shared return pressure valve for closing the main-stage valves.

FIG. 13 is a schematic representation of an exemplary hydraulic system including multiple main-stage valves, each employing a pilot valve for opening the main-stage valve and a pilot valve for closing the main-stage valve.

FIG. 14 is a schematic representation of an exemplary hydraulic system including multiple main-stage valves employing multiple pilot valves for opening and closing the main-stage valves.

FIG. 15 provides a logic table identifying various options for controlling the operation of the main-stage valves employed with the exemplary hydraulic system of FIG. 14.

FIG. 16 is a schematic representation of the exemplary hydraulic system of FIG. 14 employing a biasing member for preloading the main-stage spool to a closed position.

FIG. 17 provides a logic table identifying various options for controlling the operation of the main-stage valves employed with the exemplary hydraulic system of FIG. 16.

FIGS. 18a and 18b provide a logic table identifying various additional options for controlling the operation of the main-stage valves employed with the exemplary hydraulic system of FIG. 16.

FIG. 19A is a cross-sectional view of an exemplary main-stage valve employing an integrated pressure assist mechanism configured to open the main-stage valve in response to an upstream pressure.

FIG. 19B is an enlarged view of a portion of the main-stage valve in FIG. 19A, shown arranged in a closed position.

FIG. 19C is a view of the portion of the main-stage valve shown in FIG. 19B arranged in an open position.

FIG. 20A is a cross-sectional view of an exemplary main-stage valve employing an integrated pressure assist mechanism configured to close the main-stage valve in response to an upstream pressure.

FIG. 20B is an enlarged view of a portion of the main-stage valve shown in FIG. 20A arranged in a closed position.

FIG. 20C is a view of the portion of the main-stage valve shown in FIG. 20B arranged in an open position.

FIG. 21A is a cross-sectional view of an exemplary main-stage valve employing an integrated pressure assist mechanism configured to open the main-stage valve in response to a downstream pressure.

FIG. 21B is an enlarged view of a portion of the main-stage valve in FIG. 21A arranged in a closed position.

FIG. 21C is a view of the portion of the main-stage valve shown in FIG. 21B arranged in an open position.

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FIG. 22A is a cross-sectional view of an exemplary main-stage valve employing an integrated pressure assist mechanism configured to close the main-stage valve in response to a downstream pressure.

FIG. 22B is a view of a portion of the main-stage valve in FIG. 22A arranged in a closed position.

FIG. 22C is a view of the portion of the main-stage valve shown in FIG. 22B arranged in an open position.

FIG. 23 is a partial cross-sectional view of a damping system employed with the main-stage valve for reducing impact forces occurring when a spool of the main-stage valve is moved between a closed position and an open position.

FIG. 24 is an enlarged partial cross-sectional view of the damping system in FIG. 23.

FIG. 25A is a partial cross-sectional view of a damping system employed with a main-stage valve for reducing impact forces occurring when the spool of the main-stage valve is moved to the closed position.

FIG. 25B is an exploded view of a damping ring and a spool as seen in FIG. 25A.

FIG. 26 is a partial cross-sectional view of the co-linear valve arrangement of FIGS. 1A and 4 integrated with a hydraulic pump assembly.

FIG. 27 is a partial cross-sectional view of the split co-linear valve arrangement of FIG. 5 integrated with a hydraulic pump assembly.

FIG. 28A is a partial cross-sectional view of an exemplary main-stage manifold employing multiple main-stage valves sharing a common spool and sleeve, with the spool arranged in a first position.

FIG. 28B is a partial cross-sectional view of the exemplary main-stage manifold in FIG. 28A, with the spool arranged in a second position.

FIG. 29A is a partial cross-sectional view of an exemplary main-stage manifold employing a spool actuation surface located adjacent an outer end surface of the spool.

FIG. 29B is a partial cross-sectional view of the exemplary main-stage manifold as shown in FIG. 29A, employing a spool actuation surface located adjacent an inner end surface of the spool.

FIG. 30 is a partial cross-sectional view of an exemplary main-stage manifold employing a ring shaped valve actuator.

FIG. 31A is a partial cross-sectional view of an exemplary main-stage manifold employing a pin shaped valve actuator.

FIG. 31B is a partial cross-sectional end view of the main-stage manifold shown in FIG. 31A.

FIG. 32 is a schematic representation of an integrated hydraulic fluid distribution module for minimizing compressible fluid volume and improving system operating efficiency.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Referring now to the discussion that follows and also to the drawings, illustrative approaches to the disclosed systems and methods are shown in detail. Although the drawings represent some possible approaches, the drawings are not necessarily to scale and certain features may be exaggerated, removed, or partially sectioned to better illustrate and explain the disclosed device. Further, the descriptions set forth herein are not intended to be exhaustive or otherwise limit or restrict the claims to the precise forms and configurations shown in the drawings and disclosed in the following detailed description.

FIG. 1A illustrates an exemplary hydraulic manifold 20 for controlling the distribution of a pressurized fluid to multiple hydraulic loads having variable flow and pressure requirements. For purposes of discussion, the manifold 20 is shown

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to include four separate valves identified as main-stage valves 30, 32, 34 and 36, respectively. Although the manifold 20 is shown to include four valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 the manifold 20 may include fewer or more valves depending on the requirements of the particular application. Each main-stage valve may be fluidly connected to one or more hydraulic loads. By way of example, the hydraulic loads may include, but are not limited to, various hydraulically actuated devices, such as a hydraulic cylinder and a hydraulic motor. The main-stage valves control the operation of the hydraulic loads by selectively adjusting the pressure and flow of fluid to the respective hydraulic loads.

The valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 may be appropriately configured to enable the valves to be interconnected in various configurations to form a main-stage manifold. In the main-stage manifold configuration illustrated in FIG. 1A, the main-stage valves are stacked together in a co-linear fashion. The term “collinear” denotes that the individual valve spools are generally arranged end-to-end in a linear fashion. The main-stage valves may also be arranged in a variety of other configurations, examples of which are described subsequently.

The exemplary main-stage manifold may include an inlet port 42 through which the high pressure fluid enters the manifold 20. Four exit ports 44, 46, 48 and 50—one for each of the four main-stage valves—may be fluidly connected to a corresponding hydraulic load. The inlet port 42 may be fluidly connected to a source of pressurized fluid, such as a fixed displacement pump (not shown). A wide variety of pump configurations may be utilized, including but not limited, gear pumps, vane pumps, axial piston pumps, and radial piston pumps. It shall be appreciated, however, that other devices capable of generating a flow of pressurized fluid may also be utilized. Pressurized fluid received from the fluid source enters the manifold 20 through the inlet port 42 and exits the main-stage manifold through one or more of the exit ports 44, 46, 48 and 50. The valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 selectively control the flow of pressurized fluid from the inlet port 42 to the respective exit ports 44, 46, 48 and 50.

Each of the valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 may include a hydraulically actuated spool valve 40. Each of the valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 includes a valve body 38 and a spool valve 40 disposed within the valve body 38. Each of the spool valves 40 may include a generally cylindrical-shaped hollow sleeve, illustrated as sleeves 64, that are fixed relative to the valve body 38, and a generally cylindrical-shaped spool, illustrated as spools 66, which are slideably disposed around the outside of the sleeve 64. The spools 66 are free to move back and forth over a portion of the length of the sleeve 64. Although the terms “spool” and “sleeve” are commonly used to describe components of a spool valve, the terms are not always used consistently to refer to the same components. Accordingly, throughout this application, the term “sleeve” shall refer to the stationary component and the term “spool” shall refer to the component that is moveable relative to the stationary component. Thus, with respect to the presently described spool valve 40, since the inner member is fixed relative to the valve body 38, it shall be referred to as the “sleeve”, whereas the outer member, which is described as being moveable relative to the sleeve, shall be referred to as the “spool”. If, on the other hand, the outer member were fixed relative to the valve body and the inner member were moveable relative to the outer member, the inner member would be referred to as the “spool” and the outer member would be referred to as the “sleeve”.

The sleeves 64 and the spools 66 each may include a series of orifices that extend through the walls of the respective components, where each of the spools 66 include a series of

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orifices 80 and the sleeves 64 include a series of orifices 82. The orifices 80 and 82 are generally arranged in a common pattern to enable the orifices 80 in the spool 66 to be generally aligned with the orifices 82 in the sleeve 64 when the spool 66 is positioned in an open position relative to the sleeve 64, as shown in FIG. 1C. The valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 can be arranged in an open position (for example, valve 36 as shown in FIG. 1C) by sliding the spool 66 axially relative to the sleeve 64 so as to align the orifices 80 in the spool 66 with the orifices 82 in the sleeve 64. Such an arrangement allows pressurized fluid to pass through the spool valves 40 to the exit ports 44, 46, 48 and 50 of the valves 30, 32, 34 and 36, respectively. The spool 66 can be returned to a closed position (for example, valve 36 as seen in FIG. 1A) by sliding the spool 66 axially relative to the sleeve 64 so as to intentionally misalign the orifices in the spool 66 and the sleeve 64 to block the flow of fluid through the valve. The spools 66 of each of the four valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 are depicted in FIG. 1A in the closed position.

The valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 may be hydraulically actuated such as by way of a solenoid operated pilot valve 62. The pilot valve 62 may include an inlet port 92 fluidly connected to a pressure source. Turning to FIG. 1B, an outlet port 96 of the pilot valve 62 may be fluidly connected to a fluid cavity 98 at least partially defined by a notched region 100 in the spool 66 and a wall 102 of the valve body 38. The notched region 100 of each spool 66 includes a generally vertically oriented surface 108. Pressurizing the fluid cavity 98 exerts a generally axial force against the surface 108 of the spool 66, which tends to displace the spool 66 axially relative to the sleeve 64 to the open position.

Turning back to FIG. 1A, the spool valves may each employ a biasing member 106, which may include a variety of configurations, such as a coil spring and a leaf spring, for moving the spool 66 from the open position to the closed position. The spool valve may also be configured to have the biasing member move the spool 66 from the closed position to the open position. The biasing member 106 exerts a biasing force against the spool 66 that may be generally opposite the biasing force produced by pressurizing the fluid cavity 98 at the opposite end of the spool 66. The valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 can be positioned in the open position by sufficiently pressurizing the fluid cavity 98 to overcome the biasing force produced by the biasing member 106. Doing so causes the spool 66 to slide axially relative to the sleeve 64 so as to fluidly connect the orifices 80 of the spool 66 with the orifices 82 of the sleeve 64, as shown in FIG. 1C. The positioning of the spool 66 relative to the sleeve 64 may be controlled by means of a stop 110 that engages a first end 112 of the spool 66, or another suitable region of the spool 66, when the orifices 80 in the spool 66 are fluidly connected to the orifices 82 in the sleeve 64. Other mechanisms may also be employed for controlling the positioning of the sleeve 64 relative to the spool 66.

The spool 66 may be positioned in the closed position by adjusting the pilot valve 62, so as to depressurize the fluid cavity 98. This allows the biasing force exerted by the biasing member 106 to slide the spool 66 axially to the closed position. The orifices 80 in the spool 66 are intentionally axially misaligned with the orifices 82 in the sleeve 64 when the spool 66 is positioned in the closed position. The positioning of the spool 66 in the closed position may be controlled by having an end 113 of the spool 66, or another suitable region of the spool 66, engage a second stop 114 positioned opposite the stop 110.

The valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 may be configured such that either the inner or outer member operates as the spool 66. In

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the exemplary main-stage valve illustrated in FIG. 1A, the inner member functions as the sleeve 64 and the outer member functions as the spool 66 (i.e., is movable relative to the sleeve). As an alternative illustration, however, the inner member may be configured to operate as the spool 66 and the outer member as the sleeve 64. Further, the valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 may also be configured such that both the inner and outer members move simultaneously move in opposite directions relative to one another and the valve body 38. This latter configuration may produce faster valve actuation speeds, but may also result in systems that are more complex.

Although the flow of pressurized fluid is described as passing radially outward through the exemplary valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 when in the open position, it shall be appreciated that the main-stage manifold may also be configured such that the flow passes radially inward. In that case, the passages designated as the respective exit ports 44, 46, 48 and 50 in FIG. 1A would operate as an inlet port, and the passage designated as the inlet port 42 would operate as an exit port. The direction in which the pressurized fluid passes through the valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 is not dependent on whether the inner or outer valve member operates as the spool, or whether both members are moveable relative to one another when the valves are actuated.

The valves 30, 32, 34 and 36, and the pilot valve 62 may have separate pressure supplies or may share a common pressure source. In the exemplary manifold configuration illustrated in FIG. 1A, the valves 30, 32, 34 and 36, and the pilot valve 62, are shown sharing a common pressure source. The pressurized fluid for supplying both the valves 30, 32, 34 and 36, and the pilot valve 62, enters the main-stage manifold through the inlet port 42. The inlet port 42 is fluidly connected to the sleeve 64 of the first valve 30.

The sleeves 64 of the valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 may be connected in series to form an elongated plenum 120. Fluidly connected to a downstream end of the sleeve 64 of the last valve 36 in the series is a pilot manifold 122. The pilot manifold 122 includes a pilot supply passage 124 through which a portion of pressurized fluid may be bled from the main-stage fluid supply and delivered to the pilot valves 62. The inlet port 92 of each of the pilot valves 62 may be fluidly connected to the pilot supply passage 124. Upon actuating at least one of the pilot valves 62, a portion of fluid present in the pilot supply passages 124 passes through the pilot valve 62 to the fluid cavity 98 adjoining the spool 66, thereby actuating at least one of the valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 to the open position.

Continuing to refer to FIG. 1A, the pilot manifold 122 may include a check valve 130. The check valve 130 operates to control the flow of pressurized fluid delivered to the pilot manifold 122, and also to prevent fluid from back flowing from the pilot manifold 122 to plenum 120. The check valve 130 may have any of a variety of configurations. An example of one such configuration is illustrated in FIG. 1A, where a ball check valve is utilized to control the flow of fluid to and from the pilot manifold 122. The check valve 130 includes a ball 132 that selectively engages an inlet passage 134 of the pilot manifold 122. A spring 136 may be provided for biasing the ball 132 into engagement with the inlet passage 134 of the pilot manifold 122. When the pressure drop across the check valve 130 exceeds the biasing force exerted by the spring 136, the ball 132 will disengage the inlet passage 134 of the pilot manifold 122 to allow pressurized fluid to flow from the plenum 120 to the pilot manifold 122. The rate at which fluid flows from the hydraulic manifold 20 to the pilot manifold 122 is dependent on the pressure drop across the check valve 130. The greater the pressure drop, the higher the flow rate. In instances where the pressure drop across the check valve 130

is less than the biasing force of the spring 136, or the pressure within the pilot manifold 122 exceeds the pressure within the plenum 120, the check valve ball 132 will engage the inlet passage 134 of the pilot manifold 122 to prevent flow from passing through the check valve 130 in either direction. The spring rate of the spring 136 can be selected so as to prevent the check valve 130 from opening until a desired pressure drop across the check valve 134 is achieved.

The pilot manifold 122 may also employ a filter 140 to remove debris from hydraulic fluid. The filter 140 may be deployed in the pilot supply passage 124 connecting the pilot valves 62 to the manifold 20. A wide variety of filters 140 may be employed, including but not limited to, a band filter and a cartridge filter, as well as others. A band filter has the advantage of being cost effective, generally has a smaller packaging envelope than a cartridge filter, and may potentially be able to tolerate higher pressure drops. A cartridge filter, on the other hand, can be replaced if it becomes clogged and generally has a larger filtering surface area than a band filter, but may also require a larger packaging envelope.

The pilot manifold 122 may also include an accumulator 142 for storing pressurized fluid used to actuate the valves 30, 32, 34 and 36. The accumulator 142 may have any of a variety of configurations. For example, one version depicted in FIG. 1A may include a fluid reservoir 144 for receiving and storing pressurized fluid. The reservoir 144 may be fluidly connected to the pilot manifold 122. The accumulator 142 may include a moveable piston 146 positioned within the reservoir 144. The positioning of the piston 146 within the reservoir 144 can be adjusted to selectively vary the volume of the reservoir 144. A biasing mechanism 148, such as a coil spring, urges the piston 146 in a direction that tends to minimize the volume of the reservoir 144. The biasing mechanism 148 exerts a biasing force that opposes the pressure force exerted by the pressurized fluid present within the pilot manifold 122. If the two opposing forces are unbalanced, the piston 146 will be displaced to either increase or decrease the volume of the reservoir 144, thereby restoring the balance between the two opposing forces. In at least some situations, the pressure level within the reservoir 144 corresponds to the pressure within the pilot manifold 122. If the pressure force within the reservoir 144 exceeds the opposing force generated by the biasing mechanism 148, the piston 146 will be displaced toward the biasing mechanism 148, thereby increasing the volume of the reservoir 144 and the amount of fluid that can be stored in the accumulator 142. As the reservoir 144 continues to fill with fluid, the opposing force generated by the biasing mechanism 148 will also increase to the point at which the biasing force and the opposing pressure force exerted from within the reservoir 144 are substantially equal. The volumetric capacity of the reservoir 144 will remain substantially constant when the two opposing forces are at equilibrium. On the other hand, actuating one or more of the pilot valves 62 will generally cause the pressure level within the pilot manifold 122 to drop below the pressure level within the reservoir 144. This coupled with the fact that the pressure forces across the piston 146 then become unbalanced will cause fluid stored in the reservoir 144 to be discharged to the pilot manifold 122 for use in actuating the valves 30, 32, 34 and 36.

The valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 may be arranged within the manifold 20 in various configurations. Examples of various valve arrangements are described below, including but not limited to a co-parallel configuration, as shown in FIGS. 2A and 2B; a radial configuration, as shown in FIGS. 3A and 3B; a collinear configuration, as shown in FIGS. 1A and 4; a split collinear configuration, as shown in FIG. 5; an annular configuration, as shown in FIGS. 6A and 6B; and a two by two

(2×2) co-axial configuration, as shown in FIGS. 7A and 7B. The figures depicting the various valve arrangements each include a cross-sectional view of the manifold 20 depicting the arrangement of the main-stage valve and one or more schematic illustrations of the manifold 20 illustrating the manner in which the fluid passes through the main-stage manifold and individual main-stage valves (except for the split collinear arrangement shown in FIG. 5). These are merely a few of the possible valve arrangements; in practice other arrangements may also be employed depending on the requirements of a particular application. The exemplary valve arrangements are not intended to be in any way limiting, as other arrangements may also be utilized.

Referring to FIG. 2A, manifold 220 includes two or more valves 230 arranged in a co-parallel configuration, wherein a longitudinal axis A-A of the valves 230 are aligned substantially parallel to one another. A spool 266 and a sleeve 264 of each valve 230 may be arranged such that the spool 266 (moveable member) is the outer member and the sleeve 264 (stationary member) is the inner member. The valve 230 may also be configured such that the outer member operates as the sleeve 264 and the inner member operates as the spool 266. The path of travel of the spool 266 of each of the valves 230, which generally coincides with a longitudinal axis of the valve, may be aligned substantially parallel to one another. The path of travel between the spools 266 may lie substantially within a common plane. The valves 230 may be arranged on a common side of a manifold supply passage 222.

Turning also to FIG. 2B, an inlet 292 of each valve 230 may be fluidly connected to the manifold supply passage 222. Pressurized fluid enters the manifold supply passage 222 through an inlet 242 fluidly connected to a pressure source. The fluid passes through the manifold supply passage 222 to the inlet 292 of the respective valves 230. Actuating (i.e., opening) one or more of the valves 230 allows pressurized fluid to pass from the manifold supply passage 222 to an inner cavity 232 of the spool 266 of the valve 230. From that point the fluid passes radially outwardly through orifices 280 in the sleeve 264 and orifices 282 in the spool 266, and may be subsequently directed through a corresponding hydraulic circuit to a hydraulic load. In addition to providing certain performance benefits, the co-parallel valve arrangement may also reduce manufacturing costs by simplifying machining and assembly operations. This particular arrangement also enables the manifold 220 to be readily modified to include any number of valves depending on the requirements of the particular application.

Referring to FIGS. 3A and 3B, a manifold 320 may include two or more valves 330 arranged in a radial configuration, where the valves 330 may be arranged in a generally circular pattern around an axis A-A of a common fluid node 342. The manifold 320 may include a series of supply passages 391 that extend radially outwardly from the common fluid node 342 in a manner resembling the spokes of a wheel, for example, as shown in FIG. 3B. An inlet port 392 of the valves 330 are fluidly connected to a supply passage 391. A spool 366 and a sleeve 364 of each valve 330 may be arranged such that the spool 366 (moveable member) is the outer member and the sleeve 364 (stationary member) is the inner member, although the valve 330 may be configured such that the functions are reversed. Pressurized fluid may enter the supply passage 391 through an inlet port 393 that may be fluidly connected to a pressure source. Fluid passes through the supply passage 391 to the inlet passages of the respective valves 330. Actuating (i.e., opening) one or more of the valves 330 allows pressurized fluid to pass radially outward through the orifices 380 in

the sleeve 364 and the orifices 382 in the spool 366, and subsequently through a corresponding hydraulic circuit to a hydraulic load.

Referring to FIGS. 1A and 4, the valves 30, 32, 34, 36 are shown arranged in a collinear configuration in the manifold 20, wherein the sleeves 64 of the valves 30, 32, 34, 36 are arranged end-to-end along a common longitudinal axis A-A. FIG. 4 is a schematic illustration of the manifold of FIG. 1A, showing the fluid path through the manifold. The spool 66 and the sleeve 64 of each valve 30, 32, 34, 36 are arranged such that the spool 66 (moveable member) is the outer member and the sleeve 64 (stationary member) is the inner member. In this configuration the sleeves 64 are connected together along the common longitudinal axis A-A to form a continuous cylindrical supply passage 91. Pressurized fluid enters the supply passage through the inlet port 42 fluidly connected to a pressure source. Actuating (i.e., opening) one or more of the valves 30, 32, 34, 36 allows pressurized fluid to pass radially outward through the orifices 80 in the spool 66 and the orifices 82 in the sleeve 64 to an interconnected hydraulic circuit for supplying a hydraulic load. Fluid delivered to a particular valve passes through the sleeve 64 of each of the preceding valves prior to being delivered to the particular valve. For example, fluid delivered to the last valve 36 in the series passes through the sleeve 64 of each of the preceding valves 30, 32 and 34. The collinear valve arrangement minimizes the main-stage inlet volume, which in turn may improve the overall operating efficiency of the hydraulic system. The path of travel of the spool 66 of each of the valves 30 may be aligned substantially parallel to one another, wherein the path of travel between the spools 66 may extend substantially along a common axis. The valves 30, 32, 34 and 36 may each have a common longitudinal axis A-A that may be arranged substantially parallel to the path of travel of the spools 66. The longitudinal axis A-A may be a common axis shared by all the valves 30, 32, 34 and 36, in the manifold 20. The supply passage 91 may substantially coincide with the axis A-A of the valves.

The exemplary valve arrangement depicted in FIG. 5 is a schematic view of a modified version of the collinear valve arrangement illustrated in FIG. 4 that includes a manifold 520. This arrangement, referred to as a split co-linear configuration, may include four valves 530 separated into two pairs arranged on opposite sides of a supply passage 592. Each pair of valves 530 are arranged end-to-end in the manner described above with respect to the co-linear arrangement. Pressurized fluid is supplied to each pair of valves 530 through the supply passage 592. The pressurized fluid may pass through each pair of valves 530 as previously described with respect to the collinear valve arrangement, as shown in FIGS. 1A and 4. It shall be appreciated that each set of valves 530 may include fewer or more than two valves 530. The path of travel of the spool of each of the valves 530 may be aligned substantially parallel to one another. The path of travel of the spools may substantially extend along a common axis. For example, the valves 530 may be arranged along a common longitudinal axis A-A that extends substantially parallel to the path of travel of the spools, such that the longitudinal axis A-A is a common axis shared by all the valves 530 in the manifold 520.

Referring to FIGS. 6A and 6B, a manifold 620 may include two or more valves 630 arranged in an annular configuration similar to the arrangement shown in FIGS. 3A and 3B. The valves 630 may be arranged in a generally circular pattern around an axis A-A of an annular plenum 693. The main-stage manifold 620 includes an inlet port 692 that may be fluidly connected to a pressure supply. The inlet port 692 delivers

pressurized fluid to the annular plenum 693. The valves 630 are arranged around and fluidly connected to the annular plenum 693. The spool 666 and sleeve 664 of each valve 630 are arranged such that the spool 666 (moveable member) is the outer member and the sleeve 664 (stationary member) is the inner member. It shall be appreciated, however, that the valve 630 may also be configured such that the outer member operates as the sleeve 664 and the inner member operates as the spool 666. Pressurized fluid enters the inlet port 692 connected to a pressure source. The fluid passes through the inlet port 692 to the annular plenum 693. Upon actuating (i.e., opening) one or more of the valves 630 the pressurized fluid flows from the annular plenum 693 through the valves 630 to an exit port 644. In contrast to the previously described valve arrangements, the pressurized fluid passes radially inward through the orifices in the spool 666 and the sleeve 664 to the interior of the sleeve 664. The interior of the sleeve 664 may be fluidly connected to the exit port 644 of the valve 630. The exit ports 644 may be fluidly connected to a hydraulic load.

Referring to FIGS. 7A and 7B, a manifold 720 may include multiple valves 730 arranged in a two by two (2x2) co-axial arrangement similar to the arrangement depicted in FIGS. 2A and 2B. This configuration may include two sets of valves 730 arranged on opposite sides of a common manifold supply passage 793. A longitudinal axis A-A of the valves 730 of a given set are aligned generally parallel to one another. A spool 766 and sleeve 764 of each valve 730 are arranged such that the spool 766 (moveable member) is the inner member and the sleeve 764 (stationary member) is the outer member. It shall be appreciated, however, that the valve 730 may also be configured such that the inner member operates as the sleeve 764 and the outer member operates as the spool 766. An inlet 791 of each valve 730 is fluidly connected to the manifold supply passage 793. Pressurized fluid enters the manifold supply passage 793 through an inlet port 792 fluidly connected to a pressure source. The fluid passes through the manifold supply passage 793 to the inlet passage 791 of the respective valves 730. Actuating (i.e., opening) one or more of the valves 730 allows pressurized fluid to pass from the manifold supply passage 793 to an inner cavity 732 of the spool 766. From that point the fluid passes radially outward through the orifices 780 in the spool 766 and the orifices 782 in the sleeve 764 and may be subsequently directed through a corresponding hydraulic circuit to a hydraulic load. The path of travel of the spool 766 of each of the valves 730 may be aligned substantially parallel to at least one other valve 730 and may lie substantially within a common plane with at least one other valve 730. Each of the valves 730 may share a common longitudinal axis A-A with at least one other valve 730.

Various options exist for mounting the pilot valve to the main-stage valve. Three exemplary pilot valve mounting options are schematically depicted in FIGS. 8-10. For example, the pilot valve 862 may be mounted externally to a side of the associated main-stage valve 830, as shown in FIG. 8. This arrangement is similar to the main-stage valve and pilot valve arrangement shown in FIG. 1. The pilot valve 962 may also be mounted externally to an end of the main-stage valve 930, as shown in FIG. 9. The pilot valve 1062 may also be at least partially integrated internally within the main-stage valve 1030, as shown in FIG. 10.

The valve arrangements illustrated in FIGS. 1A-10, may employ various actuating schemes. An example of one such arrangement for actuating the valves is illustrated schematically in FIG. 11. This arrangement utilizes a pilot valve 1162 and a biasing member, such as return spring 1106, for controlling the actuation of each main-stage valve 1130. Return

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spring 1106 may have any of a variety of configurations, including but not limited to, a coil spring and a leaf spring. Separate pressure sources, such as pumps 1133 and 1135, may be provided for supplying a flow of pressurized fluid to the pilot valve 1162 and the main-stage valves 1130, respectively. A pressure regulator may be provided to control a discharge pressure of the pressure sources. It shall be appreciated, however, that the pilot valves 1162 and the main-stage valves 1130 may also utilize a common pressure source. An example of an integrated pilot valve 1162 and main-stage valve manifold configured to utilize a common pressure source is illustrated in FIGS. 1A, 2A, and 3A.

Continuing to refer to FIG. 11, operation of the main-stage valve may be controlled by the pilot valve 1162 and the return spring 1106. In one example, the pilot valve 1162 may be actuated by one or more solenoids. The solenoids may include a coil, which when energized moves the pilot valve 1162 between an open position and a dump position. Arranging the pilot valve 1162 in the open position allows pressurized fluid from the pump 1133 to flow through the pilot valve 1162 to the main-stage valve 1130. The pressurized fluid from the pilot valve 1162 causes the spool of the main-stage valve 1130 to move to the open position (such as previously described with respect to FIG. 1A), thereby allowing pressurized fluid to flow from the pump 1135 through the valve 1130 to a hydraulic load 1137. Arranging the pilot valve 1162 in the dump position causes the pilot valve to stop the flow of pressurized fluid used to open the valve 1130 and fluidly connects the pilot valve to a low pressure reservoir 1163. This allows the biasing force of the return spring 1106 to move the spool of the main-stage valve 1130 back to the closed position, thereby blocking the flow of pressurized fluid to the hydraulic load 1137.

Utilizing a return spring 1106 to return the main-stage spool to the closed position has the advantage of providing a failsafe mechanism in the event there is a drop in system pressure. If that occurs, the return spring 1106 will operate to close the valve 1130.

The return spring 1106 can be sized to achieve a desired balance between the main-stage valve opening and closing response times. Increasing or decreasing the spring rate of the return spring 1106 may affect the opening and closing response times differently. For example, increasing the spring rate will generally result in a corresponding decrease in the closing response time and a corresponding increase in the opening response time for a given supply pressure. The corresponding increase in the opening response time is due to the fact that the biasing force of the return spring 1106 tends to resist the motion of the pilot controlled actuation force. The corresponding increase in opening response time may be overcome, for instance, by increasing the pressure used to activate the main-stage valve 1130, although doing so may not always be a viable alternative. Conversely, decreasing the spring rate of the return spring 1106 will generally result in a corresponding increase in the closing response time and a corresponding decrease in the opening response time. Accordingly, the sizing of the return spring 1106 may depend on various factors, including but not limited to the magnitude of the pilot controlled actuation force as well as the desired valve opening and closing response times required for a particular application.

With reference to FIG. 12, the main-stage valve actuating scheme illustrated in FIG. 11 may be modified by eliminating the main-stage return springs 1106, and instead using hydraulic pressure to close the main-stage valves 1230. The return pressure used to close the main-stage valves 1230 may be controlled by way of a single return pressure valve 1232. This

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arrangement utilizes a common pressure source, illustrated as pump 1233. A pressure regulator may be provided to control a discharge pressure of the pressure sources. The pump 1233 may be used to supply the necessary pressure for opening and closing the main-stage valves 1230. The closing response time for this configuration is generally proportional to the pressure output of the return pressure valve 1232. Increasing the output pressure of the return pressure valve 1232 will generally produce a corresponding decrease in the valve 1230 closing response time, whereas decreasing the output pressure will generally result in a corresponding increase in the response time. The return pressure valve 1232 may be configured to produce a minimum output pressure greater than the pressure required to drain the fluid from the pilot valves 1262 so as to provide sufficient pressure to move the spool of the main-stage valve 1230 to the closed position within a desired response time. A pressure regulator 1240 may be provided for controlling the pressure supplied to the main-stage valve 1230 from pilot valve 1232. The pressure regulator controls the pressure discharged from pilot valve 1232 by selectively fluidly connecting a discharge port 1242 of pilot valve 1232 to a low pressure reservoir 1263. The pressure regulator allows at least a portion of the pressurized fluid discharged from the pilot valve 1232 to be directed back to the reservoir 1263 when the pilot valve discharge pressure exceeds a predetermined pressure. Separate pressure sources, such as pumps 1233 and 1235, may be provided for supplying a flow of pressurized fluid to the pilot valve 1262 and the main-stage valves 1230, respectively. The pilot valves 1262 and the main-stage valves 1230 may also utilize a common pressure source, such as illustrated in FIGS. 1A, 2A, and 3A.

Operation of the main-stage valves 1230 are controlled by the pilot valves 1262 and the single return pressure valve 1232. In one example, the pilot valve 1262 may be actuated by one or more solenoids. Each solenoid may include a coil, which when energized urges the pilot valve 1262 to move between an open position and a closed position. When arranged in the open position, the pilot valve 1262 allows pressurized fluid from the pump 1233 to flow through the pilot valve 1262 to the main-stage valve 1230. The pressurized fluid from the pilot valve 1262 causes a spool of the main-stage valve 1230 to move to the open position (for example, in the manner described with respect to FIG. 1A), thereby allowing pressurized fluid to flow from the pump 1235 through the main-stage valve 1230 to a hydraulic load 1237. Arranging the pilot valve 1262 in the closed position stops the flow of pressurized fluid used to open the main-stage valve 1230. The single return pressure valve 1232 may be used to control the pressure needed to move the spool of the main-stage valve 1230 back to the closed position, thereby blocking the flow of pressurized fluid to the hydraulic load 1237.

Continuing to refer to FIG. 12, although this arrangement does not utilize a return spring to move the main-stage spool to the closed position, a return spring may nevertheless be employed to provide a failsafe mechanism for closing the main-stage valves 1230 in the event of a loss or drop in system pressure. Since the return spring is not being utilized as the primary means for returning the main-stage spool to the closed position, the spring rate of the return spring can be significantly lower than may otherwise be required if a pressure source were not applying pressure to close the main-stage valves 1230.

FIG. 13 illustrates a main-stage valve control scheme similar to that shown in FIG. 12. As is the case with the configuration shown in FIG. 12, hydraulic pressure, rather than a return spring, is used to close the main-stage valves 1330. But

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in contrast to the configuration shown in FIG. 12, this configuration utilizes separate pilot valves 1332, rather than a single return pressure valve (i.e., valve 1232 in FIG. 12), to control the pressure delivered to the main-stage valves 1330 for closing the valves. Each main-stage valve 1330 may thus employ two separate pilot valves 1332 and 1362. The pilot valve 1362 controls the opening of the main-stage valve 1330 and the other pilot valve 1332 controls the closing of the main-stage valve 1330. Although this arrangement does not utilize a return spring to move the main-stage spool to the closed position, a return spring may nevertheless be employed to provide a failsafe mechanism for closing the main-stage valve 1330 in the event of a loss or drop in system pressure. Since the return spring is not being utilized as the primary means for returning the main-stage spool to the closed position, the spring rate of the return spring can be significantly lower than may otherwise be required if a pressure source were not applying pressure to close the main-stage valve 1330. Separate pressure sources, such as pumps 1333 and 1335, may be provided for supplying a flow of pressurized fluid to the pilot valves 1332 and 1362, as well as the valves 1330, respectively. A pressure regulator may be provided to control a discharge pressure of the pressure sources. It shall be appreciated, however, that the pilot valves 1332 and 1362 as well as the main-stage valves 1330 may also utilize a common pressure source, as illustrated in FIGS. 1A, 2A, and 3A.

Operation of the main-stage valve 1330 is controlled by the pilot valves 1332 and 1362. In one example, the pilot valves 1332 and 1362 may be actuated by one or more solenoids. The solenoids may include a coil, which when energized urges the pilot valves 1332 and 1362 to move between an open position and a dump position. When arranged in the open position, the pilot valve 1362 allows pressurized fluid from the pump 1333 to flow through the pilot valve 1362 to the main-stage valve 1330. The pressurized fluid from the pilot valve 1362 causes a spool of the main-stage valve 1330 to move to the open position, thereby allowing pressurized fluid to flow from the pump 1335 through the main-stage valve 1330 to a hydraulic load 1337. Arranging the pilot valve 1362 in the dump position stops the flow of pressurized fluid used to open the main-stage valve 1330 and fluidly connects the pilot valve 1362 with a reservoir 1363. With pilot valve 1362 arranged in the dump position, the pilot valve 1332 may then be opened to supply the pressure needed to move the spool of the main-stage valve 1330 back to the closed position, thereby blocking the flow of pressurized fluid to the hydraulic load 1337.

FIG. 14 schematically illustrates a main-stage valve actuating scheme that takes advantage of the combined actuating areas of adjacent main-stage valve spools 1430 to minimize the number of pilot valves 1462 that may be required to open and close the main-stage valves 1430. Separate pressure sources, such as pumps 1433 and 1435, may be provided for supplying a flow of pressurized fluid to the pilot valves 1462 and the main-stage valves 1430, respectively. A pressure regulator may be provided to control a discharge pressure of the pressure sources. It shall be appreciated, however, that the pilot valves 1462, as well as the main-stage valves 1430, may also utilize a common pressure source, such as illustrated in FIGS. 1A, 2A, and 3A, for example. Each main-stage valve 1430 may employ two separate pilot valves 1462. One pilot valve 1462 operates to open the main-stage valve 1430 and the other pilot valve 1462 operates to close the main-stage valve 1430. The main-stage valves 1430 located at the ends of the valve series share a pilot valve 1462 with the adjacent main-stage valve 1430. For example, main-stage valve (1) (the four main-stage valves 1430 in FIG. 14 are individually

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identified as valves (1)-(4)) will share pilot valve B (the five pilot valves 1462 in FIG. 14 are individually identified as valves A-E) with adjacent main-stage valve (2), and main-stage valve (4) will share pilot valve D with adjacent main-stage valve (3). The valves 1430 located in the middle of the valve series will share two pilot valves 1462. For example, main-stage valve (2) shares pilot valve B with adjacent main-stage valve (1) and pilot valve C with adjacent main-stage valve (3).

The pilot valves 1462 may be actuated by one or more solenoids. The solenoids may include a coil, which when energized may urge the pilot valve 1462 to move between an open position and a dump position. When placed in the open position, the pilot valve 1462 allows pressurized fluid from a pump 1433 to flow through the pilot valve 1462 to the main-stage valve 1430. Arranging the pilot valve 1462 in the dump position fluidly connects the pilot valve to a low pressure reservoir 1463. Shared pilot valves 1462 may operate to simultaneously apply an opening pressure to one of the shared valves 1430 and closing pressure to the other of the shared valves 1430. For example, arranging the pilot valve B in the open position allows pressurized fluid from a pump 1433 to flow through the pilot valve B to the main-stage valve (2). With the pilot valves A and C arranged in the dump position, the pressurized fluid from the pilot valve B causes the spool of the main-stage valve (2) to move to the open position, thereby allowing pressurized fluid to flow from the pump 1433 through the main-stage valve (2) to a hydraulic load 1437. Arranging the pilot valve B in the open position simultaneously applies a closing pressure to the main-stage valve (1). The main-stage valves may also be configured such that the shared pilot valves 1462 operate to simultaneously apply an opening pressure to both shared main-stage valves 1430 or a closing pressure to both shared main-stage valves 1430. For example, opening pilot valve B may simultaneously apply a closing pressure to both main-stage valve (1) and main-stage valve (2). This arrangement may minimize the number of pilot valves 1462 by using a single pilot valve 1462 to control the operation of two main-stage valves 1430.

A logic table identifying various control schemes for opening and closing each of the main-stage valves 1430 of FIG. 14 is provided in Table 1 of FIG. 15. The table describes the effect that various pilot valve operating conditions have on the operation of the corresponding main-stage valve. For example, opening pilot valve A to pressure (valve position "1") will open main-stage valve (1) (valve position "1"). This will not have an effect on the position of the remaining three main-stage valves, which will maintain their previous positions (valve position "LC"), provided that the remaining pilot valves are opened to drain (valve position "0"). Opening pilot valve B (valve position "1"), which is shared by main-stage valves (1) and (2), and opening pilot valve A to drain (valve position "0") will result in main-stage valve (1) closing (valve position "0") and main-stage valve (2) opening (valve position "1"). Main-stage valves 3 and 4 will maintain their previous positions (valve position "LC") provided that the associated pilot valves are open to drain. The effect that opening the other pilot valves (i.e., pilot valves C, D and E) has on the operation of the main-stage valves can be readily determined from Table 1 of FIG. 15.

FIG. 16 schematically illustrates a main-stage valve actuating scheme similar to that shown in FIG. 14. A difference is the addition of a biasing member 1606 that operates to preload a spool of the main-stage valve 1630 to a closed position. The biasing member 1606 also provides a failsafe mechanism for closing the main-stage valve 1630 in the event of a loss or reduction in system pressure. The biasing member 1606 may

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also minimize feedback effects due to pressure changes that may occur when adjacent main-stage valves **1630** are actuated.

Separate pressure sources, such as pumps **1633** and **1635**, may be provided for supplying a flow of pressurized fluid to pilot valves **1662** and main-stage valves **1630**, respectively. A pressure regulator may be provided to control a discharge pressure of the pressure sources. The pilot valves **1662**, as well as the main-stage valves **1630**, may also utilize a common pressure source, such as illustrated in FIGS. **1A**, **2A**, and **3A**, for example. Each main-stage valve **1630** (the four main-stage valves are individually identified as valves (1)-(4) in FIG. **16**) may employ two separate pilot valves **1662** (the five pilot valves are individually identified as valve A-E in FIG. **16**). One pilot valve **1662** operates to open the main-stage valve **1630** and the other pilot valve **1662** operates to close the main-stage valve **1630**. The main-stage valves **1630** located at the ends of the valve series will share a pilot valve **1662** with the adjacent main-stage valve **1630**. For example, main-stage valve (1) will share pilot valve B with adjacent main-stage valve (2), and main-stage valve (4) will share pilot valve E with adjacent main-stage valve (3). The main-stage valves **1630** located in the middle of the valve series will share two pilot valves **1662**. For example, main-stage valve (2) shares pilot valve B with adjacent main-stage valve (1) and pilot valve C with adjacent main-stage valve (3).

The pilot valves **1662** may be actuated by one or more solenoids. The solenoids may include a coil, which when energized may urge the pilot valve **1662** to move between an open position and a dump position. When placed in the open position, the pilot valve **1662** allows pressurized fluid from a pump **1633** to flow through the pilot valve **1662** to the main-stage valve **1630**. Arranging the pilot valve **1662** in the dump position fluidly connects the pilot valve to a low pressure reservoir **1663**. Shared pilot valves **1662** operate to simultaneously apply an opening pressure to one of the shared main-stage valves **1630** and closing pressure to the other of the shared main-stage valves **1630**. For example, arranging the pilot valve B in the open position allows pressurized fluid from the pump **1633** to flow through the pilot valve B to the main-stage valve (2). With the pilot valves A and C arranged in the dump position, the pressurized fluid from the pilot valve B causes the spool of the main-stage valve (2) to move to the open position, thereby allowing pressurized fluid to flow from the pump **1633** through the main-stage valve (2) to a hydraulic load **1637**. Arranging the pilot valve B in the open position simultaneously applies a closing pressure to main-stage valve (1). The biasing member **1606** provides a failsafe mechanism for closing the main-stage valve **1630** in the event of a loss or reduction in system pressure. The main-stage valves may also be configured such that the shared pilot valves **1662** operate to simultaneously apply an opening pressure to both shared main-stage valves or a closing pressure to both shared main-stage valves **1662**. For example, opening pilot valve B may simultaneously apply a closing pressure to both main-stage valve (1) and main-stage valve (2). This arrangement may minimize the number of pilot valves **1662** by using a single pilot valve **1662** to control the operation of two main-stage valves **1630**.

Exemplary control logic for controlling the opening and closing of the main-stage valves **1630** employed in the control scheme shown in FIG. **16** is provided in the Table 2 of FIG. **17**. For example, if pilot valve A is open to pressure (valve position "1" in Table 2) and pilot valves B-E are open to drain (valve position "0" in Table 2), this will result in main-stage valve (1) opening (valve position "1" in Table 2) and the remaining main-stage valves **1630** remaining closed (valve

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position "0" in Table 2). The effect of various other pilot valve operating sequences may be readily determined from Table 2 of FIG. **17**.

Table 3 of FIGS. **18A** and **18B** describes exemplary control logic that may be employed with the control scheme shown in FIG. **16**. Unlike the control logic provided in Table 2 of FIG. **17**, wherein only one main-stage valve is opened at a given time, the control logic provided in Table 3 allows multiple main-stage valves to be opened simultaneously. The control data in Table 3 of FIGS. **18A** and **18B** may be interpreted in the same manner as the control data in Table 2 of FIG. **17**.

FIGS. **19A-22B** illustrate various exemplary main-stage valve configurations employing an integrated pressure assist mechanism. The integrated pressure assist mechanism operates to urge the spool of the main-stage valve toward either an open position or a closed position, depending on the particular configuration of the pressure assist mechanism, in response to the presence of a predetermined upstream or downstream pressure. For purposes of discussion, the outer member operates as the spool and the inner member operates as the sleeve, and the "upstream pressure" (Pu) refers to the pressure occurring within an interior of the sleeve and the "downstream pressure" (Pd) refers to the pressure in the region surrounding the outside of the spool.

FIG. **19A** illustrates an exemplary pressure assist mechanism **1910** configured to open a valve **1930** in response to a predetermined upstream pressure Pu. FIG. **20A** illustrates an exemplary pressure assist mechanism **2010** configured to close a valve **2030** in response to a predetermined upstream pressure Pu. FIG. **21A** illustrates an exemplary pressure assist mechanism **2110** configured to open a valve **2130** in response to a predetermined downstream pressure Pd. FIG. **22A** illustrates an exemplary pressure assist mechanism **2210** configured to close a valve **2230** in response to a predetermined downstream pressure Pd.

The pressure assist mechanism may be incorporated into the main-stage valve by providing a step **1911**, **2011**, **2111** and **2211** in the respective pressure assist mechanisms **1910**, **2010**, **2110** and **2210**. Each step consists of a step **1912**, **2012**, **2112** and **2212** formed in a corresponding valve spool, **1966**, **2066**, **2166** and **2266**, respectively, as indicated in FIGS. **19A-22B**. A corresponding step **1914**, **2014**, **2114** and **2214** is also incorporated into a sleeve **1964**, **2064**, **2164** and **2264**, respectively. The step causes opposing pressure induced axial forces to be exerted against the spool and the sleeve, which tend to cause the valve to either open or close depending on the particular configuration of the pressure assist mechanism. The magnitude of the opposing forces is determined, at least in part, by the size of the step. The larger the step the larger the opposing forces for a given pressure drop.

Continuing to refer to FIGS. **19A-22B**, the placement of the step relative to orifices in the sleeve (i.e., orifices **1982**, **2082**, **2182** and **2282**) and the spool (i.e., orifices **1980**, **2080**, **2180** and **2280**) determines whether the pressure assist mechanism is responsive to the upstream pressure Pu or downstream pressure Pd. If the step occurs across an orifice of the sleeve when the valve is closed, such as the configuration shown in FIGS. **19A** and **20A**, the pressure assist mechanism will be responsive to the upstream pressure Pu. If the step occurs across an orifice of the spool when the valve is closed, such as the configuration shown in FIGS. **21A** and **22A**, the pressure assist mechanism will be responsive to the downstream pressure Pd.

As can be observed from FIGS. **19A-22B**, one side of the step may be defined by the spool and an opposite side of the step may be defined by the sleeve. The step in the spool and the sleeve at least partially define a fluid pathway **1913**, **2013**,

2113 and **2213** between the orifice in the spool and the corresponding orifice in the sleeve when the valve is open. Whether the pressure assist mechanism operates to open or close the valve is determined by which side of the orifice the spool portion of the step is positioned. Positioning the spool portion of the step alongside an edge of the orifice nearest the return spring, such as the configuration shown in FIGS. **19A** and **21A**, will result in the pressure assist mechanism opening the main-stage valve when a predetermined pressure is achieved. Positioning the spool portion of the step alongside the opposite edge of the orifice away from the return spring, such as the configuration shown in FIGS. **20A** and **22A**, will result in the pressure assist mechanism closing the main-stage valve when a predetermined pressure is achieved.

Referring to FIGS. **19A** thru **19C**, the step **1911** of the pressure assist mechanism **1910** is positioned across the orifice **1982** of the sleeve **1964** (stationary member) when the valve **1930** is arranged in the closed position (i.e., FIGS. **19A** and **19B**), and consequently the pressure assist mechanism **1910** will be responsive to the upstream pressure P_u (i.e., pressure occurring within the interior region of the sleeve **1964**). FIG. **19B** is an enlarged view of the pressure assist mechanism **1910**, showing the step **1912** in the spool **1966**, and the step **1914** in the sleeve **1964**. The spool portion of the step **1912** is located alongside the orifice **1982** nearest a return spring **1906**. The return spring **1906** may be in communication with at least the spool **1966**, and operates to urge the spool **1966** toward the closed position (i.e., FIGS. **19A** and **19B**) from the open position (i.e., FIG. **19C**). Thus, the pressure occurring within the orifice **1982** of the sleeve **1964** will tend to push the step **1912** away from the step **1914** of the sleeve **1964**, and toward the return spring **1906**, thereby opening the valve **1930** when the predetermined pressure is achieved, such as illustrated in FIG. **19C**.

The steps **1912** and **1914** cooperate with one another to at least partially define the fluid pathway **1913** between the orifice **1982** of the sleeve **1964** and the orifice **1980** of the spool **1966** when the valve **1930** is arranged in the open position, as shown in FIG. **19C**. With the valve **1930** arranged in the open position, the steps **1912** and **1914** may be fluidly connected to the orifices **1980** and **1982**. The steps **1912** and **1914** may be substantially fluidly disconnected from the orifice **1980** when the valve **1930** is arranged in the closed position, as shown in FIGS. **19A** and **19B**, but remain fluidly connected to orifice **1982**.

Referring to FIGS. **20A** thru **20C**, the step **2011** of the pressure assist mechanism **2010** is positioned across the orifice **2082** of the sleeve **2064** (stationary member) when the valve **2030** is arranged in a closed position (i.e., FIGS. **20A** and **20B**), and consequently the pressure assist mechanism **2010** will be responsive to the upstream pressure P_u (i.e., pressure occurring within the interior region of the sleeve **2064**). The spool portion **2066** of the step **2012** is located alongside the orifice **2082** furthest from a return spring **2006**. The return spring **2006** operates to urge the spool **2066** toward the closed position (i.e., FIGS. **20A** and **20B**) from the open position (i.e., FIG. **20C**). FIG. **20B** is an enlarged view of the pressure assist mechanism **2010**, illustrating the positioning of the step **2012** in the spool **2066**, as well as the corresponding step **2014** in the sleeve **2064**, when the valve **2030** is arranged in the closed position. FIG. **20C** is an enlarged view of the valve **2030** arranged in the open position, with the orifices **2080** of the spool **2066** fluidly connected to the orifices **2082** of the sleeve **2064**. The pressure occurring within the orifice **2082** of the sleeve **2064** will tend to urge the step **2012** of the spool **2066** away from the step **2014** of the sleeve **2064** and away from the return spring **2006**, thereby closing

the valve **2030** when a predetermined pressure is achieved, such as shown in FIGS. **20A** and **20B**.

The steps **2012** and **2014** cooperate with one another to at least partially define the fluid pathway **2013** between the orifice **2082** of the sleeve **2064** and the orifice **2080** of the spool **2066** when the valve **2030** is arranged in the open position, as shown in FIG. **20C**. When the valve **2030** is arranged in the open position (FIG. **20C**), the steps **2012** and **2014** may be fluidly connected to the orifices **2080** and **2082**. The steps **2012** and **2014** may be substantially fluidly disconnected from the orifice **2080** when the valve **2030** is arranged in the closed position, as seen in FIGS. **20A** and **B**, but remain fluidly connected to orifice **2082**.

Referring to FIGS. **21A** thru **21C**, the step **2111** of the pressure assist mechanism **2110** is positioned across the orifice **2180** of the spool **2166** (moveable member) when the spool **2166** is arranged in a closed position (i.e., FIGS. **21A** and **21B**), and as a consequence, the pressure assist mechanism **2110** will be responsive to the downstream pressure P_d (i.e., pressure occurring around the exterior region of the spool **2166**). The spool portion of the step **2111** is located alongside the orifice **2180** nearest a return spring **2106**. The return spring **2106** operates to urge the spool **2166** toward the closed position (i.e., FIGS. **21A** and **21B**). FIG. **21B** is an enlarged view of the pressure assist mechanism **2110**, showing the positioning of the step **2112** in the spool **2166**, and the corresponding step **2114** in the sleeve **2164**, with the valve **2130** arranged in the closed position, and FIG. **21C** is an enlarged view of the valve **2130** with the spool **2166** arranged in an open position. The pressure occurring within the orifice **2180** of the spool **2166** will tend to push the step **2112** away from the step **2114** of the spool **2166** and toward the return spring **2106**, thereby opening the valve **2130** when a predetermined pressure is achieved, such as illustrated in FIG. **21C**.

The steps **2112** and **2114** cooperate with one another to at least partially define the fluid pathway **2113** between the orifice **2182** of the sleeve **2164** and the orifice **2180** of the spool **2166** when the valve **2130** is arranged in the open position, as shown in FIG. **21C**. With the valve **2130** arranged in the open position, the steps **2112** and **2114** are fluidly connected to the orifices **2180** and **2182**. The steps **2112** and **2114** may be substantially fluidly disconnected from the orifice **2182** when the valve **2130** is arranged in the closed position, as shown in FIGS. **21A** and **21B**, but remain fluidly connected to orifice **2180**.

Referring to FIGS. **22A** thru **22C**, the step **2211** of the pressure assist mechanism **2210** is positioned across the orifice **2280** of the spool **2266** (moveable member) when the spool is arranged in a closed position (i.e., FIGS. **22A** and **22B**), and thus, the pressure assist mechanism **2210** will be responsive to the downstream pressure P_d (i.e., pressure occurring around the exterior region of the spool **2266**). FIG. **22B** is an enlarged view of the pressure assist mechanism **2210** showing the relative positioning of the step **2212** in the spool **2266** and the step **2214** in the sleeve **2264** when the valve **2230** is arranged in a closed position, and FIG. **22C** is an enlarged view of the valve **2230** with the spool **2266** arranged in an open position. The spool portion of the step **2212** is located alongside the orifice **2280** furthest from a return spring **2206**. The return spring **2206** operates to urge the spool **2266** toward the closed position, as shown in FIGS. **22A** and **22B**. Thus, the pressure occurring within the orifice **2280** of the spool **2266** will tend to push the step **2212** away from the step **2214** of the spool **2266** and away from the return spring **2206**, thereby urging the valve **2230** toward the closed position when a predetermined pressure is achieved.

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The steps **2212** and **2214** cooperate with one another to at least partially define the fluid pathway **2213** between the orifice **2282** of the sleeve **2264** and the orifice **2280** of the spool **2266** when the valve **2230** is arranged in the open position, as shown in FIG. **22C**. With the valve **2230** in the open position, the steps **2212** and **2214** may be fluidly connected to the orifices **2280** and **2282**. The steps **2212** and **2214** may be substantially fluidly disconnected from the orifice **2282** when the valve **2230** is arranged in the closed position, as shown in FIGS. **22A** and **22B**, but remain fluidly connected to orifice **2280**.

It should be noted that, although pressure assist mechanisms **1910**, **2010**, **2110** and **2210** are illustrated as being positioned across the orifice located either furthest or closest to the return spring, the step of the pressure assist mechanisms **1910**, **2010**, **2010** and **2210** may be located across any of the orifices in the spool or the sleeve. Also, in another example, the steps of the pressure assist mechanisms **1910**, **2010**, **2110** and **2210** may be located at any position along the spool or the sleeve, provide the pressure assist mechanism is in fluid communication with an orifice of the sleeve or the spool.

Cycling the main-stage valve between the open and closed positions may generate high impact forces when the spool contacts stops that limit the travel of the spool. This may not only produce undesirable noise, but may also impact the durability of the main-stage valve and the accuracy with which the valve can be controlled. FIG. **23** is an illustration of an exemplary valve **2330** employing a spool **2366** having a damper **2312** fixedly attached to an end of the spool. The damper **2312** may be constructed from an elastically compliant material for absorbing at least a portion of the impact forces occurring when the valve is moved from the open position to the closed position. A generally opposing end of the valve **2330** may include a second damper **2310** that operates to dampen the impact forces occurring when the valve is moved from the closed position to the open position. FIG. **24** is an enlarged view of the end of the main-stage spool **2366**, showing a stop region **2311** of the damper **2312** contacting a stop **2320** of a valve housing **2319** when the valve is arranged in the closed position.

The valve **2330** may include a generally cylindrical-shaped hollow sleeve **2364** fixed relative to the valve housing **2319**, and the generally cylindrical-shaped spool **2366**, which is slideably disposed around the outside of the sleeve **2364**. The spool **2366** is free to move back and forth over a portion of the length of the sleeve **2364** between the open position and the closed position. FIGS. **23** and **24** illustrate the valve **2330** arranged in the closed position. The valve **2330** may employ a biasing member, which is illustrated as a return spring **2306**, for moving the spool **2366** from the open position to the closed position.

Referring to FIG. **23**, the sleeve **2364** and the spool **2366** each may include a series of orifices **2382** and **2380** that extend through the walls of the respective components. The orifices **2380** in the spool **2366** are fluidly connected to the orifices **2382** in the sleeve **2364** when the spool **2366** is positioned in an open position relative to the sleeve **2364**. The orifices **2380** and **2382** are substantially fluidly disconnected from the orifices **2382** in the sleeve **2364** when the spool **2366** is positioned in a closed position relative to the sleeve **2364**.

Continuing to refer to FIG. **23**, the impact forces produced upon opening the valve **2330** may be dampened by constructing the damper **2310** from an elastically compliant material. Suitable materials may include, but are not limited to, engineered plastics, such as polyetheretherkeone having approximately twenty percent carbon fiber filler. The damper **2310** may include a bearing surface **2308** that engages an end of the

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spool **2366**. The damper **2310** may further include a stop region **2316** having an end **2317** that engages the valve housing **2319** to limit the travel of the main-stage spool **2366** upon opening. Opening the valve **2330** causes the spool **2366** to displace the damper **2310** toward the housing **2319**. The damper **2310** may elastically deform upon impacting the valve housing **2319** to absorb at least a portion of the impact energy. The damper **2310** may also include a flange **2313** that engages an end of the biasing member **2306**. An opposite end of the biasing member engages the valve housing **2319**. At least a portion of damper **2310** may be disposed within the biasing member **2306**. The biasing member **2306** operates to urge the spool **2366** toward the closed position. The end **2317** of the damper **2310** is disengaged from the housing **2319** when the spool **2366** is displaced away from the open position.

With reference to FIG. **24**, the impact forces produced upon closing the valve **2330** may be dampened by forming the damper **2312** from an elastically compliant material. The stop region **2311** of damper **2312** may include a shoulder **2314** that engages the stop **2320** formed in the valve housing **2319** as the spool **2366** of the valve **2330** is moved to the closed position. The shoulder **2314** may be any surface of the damper **2312** that contacts the surface of the stop **2320** of the valve housing as the valve **2330** is closed.

The damper **2312** may elastically deform to absorb at least a portion of the impact energy that is created as the shoulder **2314** of the damper contacts the stop **2320** of the valve housing as the valve **2330** is closed. The shoulder **2314** disengages the stop **2320** when the valve **2330** is moved to the open position. Suitable materials for the damper **2312** may include, but are not limited to, engineered plastics, such as polyetheretherkeone having approximately twenty percent carbon fiber filler. When the damper **2312** impacts the stop **2320** upon closing the valve **2330**, the elastically compliant material elastically deforms to absorb at least a portion of the impact energy and cushion the impact. The elastically compliant material may be the same or a different material than the material used to construct the remaining portion of the spool **2366**.

With reference to FIG. **25A**, the impact forces produced upon closing a valve **2530** may be dampened by forming a portion of a spool **2566** that contacts the valve housing out of an elastically compliant material capable of absorbing at least a portion of the impact forces occurring when the valve is closes. The valve **2530** may include a generally cylindrical-shaped hollow sleeve **2564** fixed relative to a valve body **1519**, and the generally cylindrical-shaped spool **2566**, which is slideably disposed around the outside of the sleeve **2564**. The spool **2566** is free to move back and forth over a portion of the length of the sleeve **2564** between an open position and a closed position. FIG. **25A** illustrates the valve **2530** arranged in the closed position. The sleeve **2564** and the spool **2566** each may include a series of orifices **2582** and **2580** that extend through the walls of the respective components. The orifices **2580** and **2582** are generally arranged in a common pattern to enable the orifices **2580** in the spool **2566** to be generally aligned with the orifices **2582** in the sleeve **2564** when the spool **2566** is positioned in the open position relative to the sleeve **2564**. The orifices **2580** and **2582** are generally misaligned with the orifices **2582** in the sleeve **2564** when the spool **2566** is positioned in the closed position relative to the sleeve **2564**.

The spool **2566** may include a stepped region **2518** that engages a stop **2510** formed in a valve housing **2519**. The stepped region **2518** may include a ring **2512** attached to the spool **2566**. In one example, the ring **2512** may be formed

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from an elastically compliant material, such as an engineered plastic for example, polyetheretherkeone having approximately twenty percent carbon fiber filler. It shall be appreciated, however, that other generally elastic compliant materials may also be employed.

FIG. 25B is an exploded view of the spool 2566 with the elastically compliant ring 2512 shown removed from the spool 2566. The elastically compliant ring 2512 impacts the stop 2510 in the valve housing 2519 upon closing the valve 2530. The elastically compliant ring 2512 deforms elastically upon impacting the stop 2510 to absorb at least a portion of the impact energy upon closing the valve 2530. The elastically compliant portion of the spool 2566 may be formed by over-molding the elastically complaint ring 2512 to the spool 2566. The elastically compliant ring 2512 may be secured to the spool 2566 by providing the ring 2512 with at least one inwardly extending boss 2516 that engages a corresponding aperture 2517 formed in the spool 2566. It should be noted, however, that the ring 2512 may be secured to the spool 2566 in other ways as well. For example, the compliant ring 2512 may engage an annular circumferential slot formed in the spool 2566.

With reference to FIG. 26, a valve manifold 2620 employing the co-linear valve arrangement, such as shown in FIG. 1A, may be integrated with a pump assembly 2610 for supplying pressurized fluid to a series of valves 2630. This arrangement minimizes the manifold volume, which in turn may improve the overall operating efficiency of a hydraulic system that includes the pump assembly 2610. The pump assembly 2610 may include any of a variety of known fixed displacement pumps, including but not limited to, gear pumps, vane pumps, axial piston pumps, and radial piston pumps. The pump assembly 2610 may include a pump input shaft 2612 for driving the pump assembly 2610.

The valve manifold 2620 may include multiple hydraulically actuated spool valves 2630. Each of the valves 2630 may include a generally cylindrical-shaped hollow sleeve 2664 that is fixed relative to the manifold 2620, and a generally cylindrical-shaped spool 2666 that is slideably disposed around the outside of the sleeve 2664. The spools 2666 are free to move back and forth over a portion of the length of the sleeve 2664 between an open position and a closed position.

The sleeve 2664 and the spool 2666 each may include a series of orifices that extend through the walls of the respective components. The spool 2666 includes a series of orifices 2680 and the sleeve 2664 includes a series of orifices 2682. The orifices 2680 and 2682 are generally arranged in a common pattern to enable the orifices 2680 in the spool 2666 to be generally aligned with the orifices 2682 in the sleeve 2664 when the spool 2666 is positioned in the open position relative to the sleeve 2664. FIG. 26 illustrates the spool 2666 positioned in the closed position, where the orifices 2680 and 2682 are generally misaligned with one another to substantially restrict fluid communication between the spool 2666 and the sleeve 2664. The valves 2630 may each employ a biasing member, illustrated as a return spring 2606, for moving the spool 2666 from the open position to the closed position.

Extending from the pump 2610 is a pump input shaft 2612. The pump input shaft 2612 may extend lengthwise through a plenum 2614 formed by the interconnected valve sleeves 2664 of the individual valves 2630. An end 2616 of the pump input shaft 2612 extends through an end cap 2618 of the main-stage manifold 2620, and may be connected to an external power source, such as an engine, electric motor, or another power source capable of outputting a rotational torque. The end cap 2618 may be attached to a housing 2619 of the

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manifold 2620, and may include a bearing 2621, for example, a needle bearing, roller bearing, or sleeve bearing, for rotatably supporting the end 2616 of the pump input shaft 2612.

The valves 2630 may be hydraulically actuated by a solenoid operated pilot valve 2662. The pilot valve 2662 may be fluidly connected to a pressure source, such as a pump 2660. When opened, the pilot valve 2662 allows pressurized fluid from the pump 2660 to flow through the pilot valve 2662 to the valve 2630. The pressurized fluid from the pilot valve 2662 causes the spool 2666 of the valve 2630 to move to the open position, thereby allowing pressurized fluid to flow from the pump 2610 through the valve 2630 to a hydraulic load. Closing the pilot valve 2662 stops the flow of pressurized fluid to the valve 2630, thereby allowing the return spring 2606 to move the spool 2666 of the valve 2630 back to the closed position.

The pump assembly 2610 may be configured to allow fluid to enter the pump assembly 2610 through an inlet passage 2627. The inlet passage 2627 may be positioned at any of a variety of locations on the pump assembly, including but not limited to, on an outer circumference 2623 of the pump assembly 2610, on a side 2625 of the pump assembly 2610 opposite the valve manifold 2620, or any other suitable location. For purposes of discussion, the inlet passage 2627 is shown in FIG. 26 arranged along the outer circumference 2623 of the pump. The fluid enters the pump assembly 2610 through the inlet passage 2627 and travels radially inward as the fluid passes through the pump assembly 2610. Pressurized fluid may exit the pump assembly 2610 through one or more discharge ports 2628 arranged along a side 2626 of the pump assembly 2610. The pressurized fluid may be discharged from the pump assembly into the plenum 2614 formed by the interconnected sleeves 2664 of the valves 2630. The pressurized fluid can travel along an annular passage 2625 formed between an inner wall 2627 of the sleeves 2664 and the input shaft 2612 to the respective valves 2630. Actuating one or more of the valves 2630 to the open position allows the pressurized fluid to pass through the orifices 2680 in the spool 2666 and the orifices 2682 in the sleeve 2664 to an exit port 2629 of the valve 2630.

FIG. 27 shows a pump assembly 2710 integrated into a valve manifold 2720 employing the split collinear valve arrangement shown in FIG. 5. This arrangement also minimizes the manifold inlet volume, which in turn may improve the overall operating efficiency of a hydraulic system. In this configuration, the pump assembly 2710 is arranged between two sets of valves 2730. Arranging the pump assembly 2710 between the valves 2730 may require an inlet 2727 of the pump assembly 2710 to be positioned along an outer circumference 2723 of the pump assembly 2710. However, depending on the size and configuration of the pump assembly 2710, it may also be possible to position the pump inlet 2727 at another location on the pump.

The valve manifold 2720 may include multiple hydraulically actuated spool valves 2730. Each of the valves 2730 may include a generally cylindrical-shaped hollow sleeve 2764 that is fixed relative to the manifold 2720, and a generally cylindrical-shaped spool 2766, which is slideably disposed around the outside of the sleeve 2764. The spools 2766 are free to move back and forth over a portion of the length of the sleeve 2764 between an open position and a closed position.

The sleeve 2764 and the spool 2766 each may include a series of orifices that extend through the walls of the respective components. The spool 2766 includes a series of orifices 2780 and the sleeve 2764 includes a series of orifices 2782. The orifices 2780 and 2782 are generally arranged in a common pattern to enable the orifices 2780 in the spool 2766 to be

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generally aligned with the orifices 2782 in the sleeve 2764 when the spool 2766 is positioned in an open position relative to the sleeve 2764. The valves 2730 may each employ a biasing member, illustrated as a return spring 2706, for moving the spool 2766 from the open position to the closed position.

The valves 2730 may be hydraulically actuated by a solenoid operated pilot valve 2762. The pilot valve 2762 may be fluidly connected to a pressure source, such as a pump 2760. When opened, the pilot valve 2762 allows pressurized fluid from the pump 2760 to flow through the pilot valve 2762 to the valves 2730. The pressurized fluid from the pilot valve 2762 causes the spool of the valve 2730 to move to the open position, thereby allowing pressurized fluid to flow from the pump assembly 2710 through the valves 2730 to a hydraulic load. Closing the pilot valve 2762 stops the flow of pressurized fluid to the valve and allows the return spring 2706 to move the spool 2766 back to the closed position.

The pump assembly 2710 may include a pump input shaft 2712 that extends outward from at least one side of the pump assembly 2710. The pump input shaft 2712 extends lengthwise through a plenum 2714 formed by the interconnected valve sleeves 2764 of the individual valves 2730. An end 2716 of the pump input shaft 2712 extends through an end cap 2718 of the manifold 2720 and may be rotatably supported by a bearing 2721, which may include, for example, a needle bearing, roller bearing, or sleeve bearing. The end cap 2718 may be attached to the housing 2719 of the manifold 2720 and may include the bearing 2721. The end 2716 of the pump input shaft 2712 may be exposed and connected to an external power source, such as an engine, electric motor, or another power source capable of outputting a rotational torque. The pump assembly 2710 may also be configured to have the pump input shaft 2712 extend from both sides of the pump assembly 2710, in which case an opposite end 2731 of the pump input shaft 2712 may be rotatably supported by a bearing 2722 mounted to a manifold end cap 2729 that is attached to the manifold housing 2719.

Fluid enters the pump assembly 2710 through the pump inlet 2727 and travels radially inwardly as the fluid passes through the pump assembly 2710. Pressurized fluid may exit the pump assembly 2710 through one or more discharge ports 2728 arranged along opposite sides 2726 and 2727 of the pump assembly 2710. The pressurized fluid may be discharged from the pump assembly 2710 into the plenum 2714 formed by the interconnected sleeves 2764 of the valves 2730. The pressurized fluid can travel along an annular passage 2725 formed between the inner wall 2727 of the sleeves 2764 and the pump input shaft 2712 to the respective valves 2730. Actuating the valve 2730 to the open position allows the pressurized fluid to pass through the orifices 2780 in the spool 2766 and the orifices 2782 in the sleeve 2664 to an exit port 2729 of the valves 2730.

FIGS. 28A-28B illustrate a manifold 2820 for controlling the distribution of pressurized fluid to multiple hydraulic loads having variable flow and pressure requirements. The manifold 2820 includes a pair of valves 2830 and 2832 that employ a single sleeve 2864 and a single spool 2866. Although the manifold 2820 is depicted in FIGS. 28A and 28B as having two valves 2830 and 2832, it shall be appreciated that in practice the manifold 2820 may include more valves depending, at least in part, on the requirements of the particular application.

Each of the valves 2830 and 2832 share the generally cylindrical-shaped hollow sleeve 2864 that is fixed relative to the manifold 2820, and the generally cylindrical-shaped spool 2866, which is slideably disposed around the outside of

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the sleeve 2864. The spool 2866 is free to move back and forth over a portion of the length of the sleeve 2864 between a first position and a second position.

The sleeve 2864 and the spool 2866 each may include a series of orifices that extend through the walls of the respective components. The spool 2866 includes a series of orifices 2880 and the sleeve 2864 includes a series of orifices 2882. The orifices 2880 of the sleeve 2864 that correspond with orifices 2882 of the spool 2866 for the valve 2830 are designated as Set 1, and the orifices 2880 of the sleeve 2864 that correspond with orifices 2882 of the spool 2866 for the valve 2832 are designated as Set 2. The spool 2866 is movable axially relative to the sleeve 2864 between the first position and the second position. The spool 2866 allows fluid to pass from the interior region of the sleeve 2864 to the exit port 2842 of valve 2830 when the spool is in the first position (FIG. 28A), and the spool 2866 allows fluid to pass from the interior region of the sleeve 2864 to the exit port 2844 of the valve 2832 when the spool is in the second position (FIG. 28B). The orifices 2880 and 2882 of Set 1 (i.e., valve 2830) are generally arranged in a common pattern to enable the orifices 2880 in the spool 2866 to be generally aligned with the orifices 2882 in the sleeve 2864 when the spool 2866 is positioned in the first position (FIG. 28A). Similarly, the orifices 2880 and 2882 of Set 2 (i.e., valve 2832) are generally arranged in a common pattern to enable the orifices 2880 in the spool 2866 to be generally aligned with the orifices 2882 in the sleeve 2864 when the spool 2866 is position in the second position (FIG. 28B). With the spool 2866 arranged in the first position (FIG. 28A), the orifices 2880 and 2882 of Set 2 (i.e., valve 2832) are misaligned such that the spool 2866 of the valve 2832 is substantially fluidly disconnected from the sleeve 2864 of the valve 2832. With the spool 2866 arranged in the second position (FIG. 28B), the orifices 2880 and 2882 of Set 1 (i.e., valve 2830) are misaligned such that the spool 2866 of the valve 2830 is substantially fluidly disconnected from the sleeve 2864 of the valve 2830.

The spool 2866 is depicted in FIG. 28A in the first position, wherein the valve 2830 is open and the valve 2832 closed. The valve 2830 may be arranged in the closed position, as shown in FIG. 28B, by sliding the spool 2866 axially relative to the sleeve 2864, which also simultaneously opens the valve 2832. Opening either of the valves 2830 or 2832 allows pressurized fluid to pass through the valves 2830 and 2832 to the respective exit ports 2842 and 2844. Closing either one of the valves 2830 and 2832 causes the other valve to open. Likewise, opening one of the valves 2830 and 2832 causes the other valve to close.

Manifold 2820 may also include a pilot valve 2862 for actuating the spool 2866 between the second position and the first position. The valves 2830 and 2832 may be hydraulically actuated by means of the pilot valve 2862, which may be a solenoid operated pilot valve. The pilot valve 2862 may include an inlet port 2863 fluidly connected to a pressure source. The pilot valve 2862 may be selectively activated to allow fluid pressure to be applied to an end 2865 of the spool 2866 to move the spool from the second position (FIG. 28B), in which valve 2832 is open and valve 2830 is closed, to the first position (FIG. 28A), in which valve 2830 is opened and valve 2832 is closed. The valves 2830 and 2832 may also employ a biasing member, illustrated as a return spring 2806, for moving the spool 2866 between the first position (FIG. 28A), where the valve 2830 is open and the valve 2832 is closed, and the second position (FIG. 28B), where valve 2830 is closed and the valve 2832 is open.

The positioning of the spool 2866 relative to the sleeve 2864 may be controlled by means of a stop 2811 that engages

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a first end **2812** of the spool **2866**, or another suitable region of the spool **2866**, when the spool **2866** is arranged in the first position (FIG. **28A**). The positioning of the spool **2866** relative to the sleeve **2864** may also be controlled by means of a second stop **2813** that engages a second end **2815** of the spool **2866**, or another suitable region of the spool **2866**, when the spool **2866** is arranged in the second position (FIG. **28B**).

In one example, the spool **2866** may be moved to the first position, as illustrated in FIG. **28A**, by arranging the pilot valve **2862** in an open position, which opens the valve **2830** and closes the valve **2832**. Arranging the pilot valve **2862** in the open position delivers pressurized fluid to the cavity **2898** adjacent the end **2815** of the spool **2866**. The force exerted by the pressurized fluid overcomes the biasing force exerted by the return spring **2806** and displaces the spool **2866** toward the stop **2811** and into the first position. The spool **2866** may be returned to the second position, which closes the valve **2830** and opens the valve **2832** (FIG. **28B**), by closing the pilot valve **2862** to depressurize the cavity **2898**. This allows the biasing force exerted by the return spring **2806** to slide the spool **2866** axially to the second position. The manifold may also be configured such that arranging the pilot valve **2862** in the open position opens valve **2832** and arranging the pilot valve in the closed position opens valve **2830**, provided that the return spring **2806** is positioned on the other end of the spool **2866**.

The valves **2830** and **2832** may be configured such that either the inner or outer member operates as the spool **2866**. In the exemplary valve illustrated in FIGS. **28A** and **28B**, the inner member functions as the sleeve **2864** and the outer member functions as the spool **2866** (i.e., is movable relative to the sleeve). It shall be appreciated, however, that in practice, the inner member may be configured to operate as the spool **2866** and the outer member as the sleeve **2864**. Further, the valves **2830** and **2832** may also be configured such that both the inner and outer members move simultaneously relative to the valve body. This latter configuration may produce faster valve actuation speeds, but may do so at the risk of increased complexity and cost.

Although the flow of pressurized fluid is described as passing radially outward through the exemplary valves **2830** and **2832** when arranged in the open position, it shall be appreciated that the main-stage manifold may also be configured such that the flow passes radially inward. In that case, the passages designated as the respective exit ports **2842** and **2844** would operate as an inlet port, and the passage designated as the inlet port **2842** would operate as an exit port. The direction in which the pressurized fluid passes through the valves **2830** and **2832** is not dependent on whether the inner or outer valve member operate as the spool, or whether both members are moveable relative to one another when the valves are actuated.

The valves **2830** and **2832** and the pilot valve **2862** may have separate pressure supplies or may share a common pressure source. In the exemplary manifold configuration illustrated in FIGS. **28A** and **28B**, the valves **2830** and **2832**, and the pilot valve **2862**, are shown sharing a common pressure source. The pressurized fluid for supplying both the valves **2830** and **2832**, and the pilot valve **2862**, enters the main-stage manifold through an inlet port **2842**. The inlet port **2842** is fluidly connected to the sleeve **2864**.

The valves **2830** and **2832** may be connected in series to form an elongated plenum **2823**. Fluidly connected to a downstream end of the sleeve **2864** of the valve **2832** is a pilot manifold **2825**. The pilot manifold **2825** includes a pilot supply passage **2827** through which a portion of pressurized fluid may be bled from the main-stage fluid supply and deliv-

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ered to the pilot valve **2862**. The inlet port **2863** of the pilot valve **2862** may be fluidly connected to the pilot supply passage **2827**.

The pilot manifold **2825** may include a check valve **2870**. The check valve **2870** operates to control the flow of pressurized fluid delivered to the pilot manifold **2825**, and also prevent fluid from back flowing from the pilot manifold **2825** to the plenum **2823**. The check valve **2870** may have any of a variety of configurations. An example of one such configuration is illustrated in FIGS. **28A** and **28B**, where a ball check valve is utilized to control the flow of fluid to and from the pilot manifold **2825**. The check valve **2870** includes a ball **2872** that selectively engages an inlet passage **2874** of the pilot manifold **2825**. A spring **2876** may be provided for biasing the ball **2872** into engagement with the inlet passage **2874** of the pilot manifold **2825**. When the pressure drop across the check valve **2870** exceeds the biasing force exerted by the spring **2876**, the ball **2872** will disengage the inlet passage **2874** of the pilot manifold **2825** to allow pressurized fluid to flow from the plenum **2823** to the pilot manifold **2825**. The rate at which fluid flows from the hydraulic manifold **2820** to the pilot manifold **2825** is dependent on the pressure drop across the check valve **2870**. The greater the pressure drop, the higher the flow rate. In instances where the pressure drop across the check valve **2870** is less than the biasing force of the spring **2876**, or the pressure within the pilot manifold **2825** exceeds the pressure within the hydraulic manifold **2820**, the check valve ball **2872** will engage the inlet passage **2874** of the pilot manifold **2825** to prevent flow from passing through the check valve **2870** in either direction. The spring rate of the spring **2876** can be selected so as to prevent the check valve **2870** from opening until a desired pressure drop across the check valve **2870** is achieved.

The pilot manifold **2825** may also include an accumulator **2890** for storing pressurized fluid used to actuate the valves **2830** and **2832**. The accumulator **2890** may have any of a variety of configurations. For example, a fluid reservoir **2892** for receiving and storing pressurized fluid may be included. The reservoir **2892** may be fluidly connected to the pilot manifold **2825**. The accumulator **2890** may include a moveable piston **2894** positioned within the reservoir **2892**. The positioning of the piston **2894** within the reservoir **2892** can be adjusted to selectively vary the volume of the reservoir **2892**. A biasing mechanism **2896**, such as a coil spring, urges the piston **2894** in a direction that tends to minimize the volume of the reservoir **2892**. The biasing mechanism **2896** exerts a biasing force that opposes the pressure force exerted by the pressurized fluid present within the pilot manifold **2825**. If the two opposing forces are unbalanced, the piston **2894** will be displaced to either increase or decrease the volume of the reservoir **2892**, thereby restoring the balance between the two opposing forces. In at least some situations, the pressure level within the reservoir **2892** corresponds to the pressure within the pilot manifold **2825**. If the pressure force within the reservoir **2892** exceeds the opposing force generated by the biasing mechanism **2896**, the piston **2894** will be displaced toward the biasing mechanism **2896**, thereby increasing the volume of the reservoir **2892** and the amount of fluid that can be stored in the accumulator **2890**. As the reservoir **2892** continues to fill with fluid, the opposing force generated by the biasing mechanism **2896** will also increase to the point at which the biasing force and the opposing pressure force exerted from within the reservoir **2892** are substantially equal. The volumetric capacity of the reservoir **2892** will remain substantially constant when the two opposing forces are at equilibrium. On the other hand, actuating the pilot valve **2862** will generally cause the pressure level within

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the pilot manifold **2825** to drop below the pressure level within the reservoir **2892**. This coupled with the fact that the pressure forces across the piston **2894** are now unbalanced will cause fluid stored in the reservoir **2892** to be discharged to the pilot manifold **2825** for use in actuating the valves **2830** and **2832**.

FIG. **29A** illustrates a manifold **2920** that includes a valve **2930**. The valve **2930** employs a spool **2966** that includes an actuator **2909** having an actuation surface **2910**. The valve **2930** may be a hydraulically actuated spool valve including a generally cylindrical-shaped hollow sleeve **2964** that is fixed relative to the manifold **2920**, and the generally cylindrical-shaped spool **2966**, which is slideably disposed around the outside of the sleeve **2964**. The spool **2966** is free to move back and forth over a portion of the length of the sleeve **2964** between an open position and a closed position. The sleeve **2964** and the spool **2966** each may include a series of orifices that extend through the walls of the respective components, where the spool **2966** includes a series of orifices **2982** and the sleeve **2964** includes a series of orifices **2980**.

The valve **2930** may be hydraulically actuated by an actuating device, such as a pilot valve, for moving the spool **2966** from the closed position to the open position. The valve **2930** may also employ a biasing member, illustrated as a return spring **2906**, for moving the spool **2966** from the open position to the closed position. Arranging the pilot valve in an open position causes a flow of pressurized fluid to be delivered to a cavity **2998** that is in fluid communication with actuation surface **2910**. The pressurized fluid exerts a generally axial force against the actuation surface **2910** of the spool **2966**, which tends to displace the spool **2966** axially relative to the sleeve **2964** in a direction toward the return spring **2906**. Closing the pilot valve depressurizes the cavity **2998**, thereby allowing the return spring **2906** to return the spool **2966** to the closed position.

The actuator **2909** may be located at an end portion **2914** of the spool **2966** opposite the return spring **2906**. The orifice **2982** of the spool **2966** may include a longitudinal axis A-A, where a dimension L that represents the length of the orifice **2982** may be measured substantially parallel to the axis A-A. The actuation surface **2910** may also include a thickness T', where the thickness T' may be less than the dimension L of the orifice **2982**.

A wall thickness T of the spool **2966** may be greater than wall thickness T' of the actuation surface **2910**, and in one example the wall thickness T may also be substantially equal to the dimension L. A wall thickness T may be selected to minimize deflection of the wall that may occur as a result of the pressure drop across the spool **2966**. For example, the pressure within the interior region of sleeve **2964** may be higher than the pressure surrounding the outer periphery of the spool **2966**. The pressure drop occurring across the spool **2966** may cause the wall of the spool to deflect outward. The amount of deflection is dependent on a variety of factors, including but not limited to, the wall thickness T, the material properties of the spool, and the magnitude of the pressure drop occurring across the spool. The wall deflection can be minimized by, among other things, increasing the wall thickness T.

In at least one example, the spool **2966** may be actuated by exerting a force on a portion of the wall thickness T, such as, for example, the wall thickness T'. The magnitude of the force applied to the spool **2966** is generally a function of the area of the actuation surface **2910** and the magnitude of the applied pressure. Increasing either the applied pressure or the surface area will generally produce a corresponding increase in the axial actuating force applied to the spool **2966**. The magni-

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tude of the actuating force can be controlled by adjusting the thickness T' of the actuation surface **2910**.

The actuation surface **2910** may be located adjacent an outer surface **2914** of the spool **2966**. Alternatively, as shown in FIG. **29B**, an actuation surface **2910'** may be located adjacent the inner surface **2916** of the spool **2966**. Referring to both FIGS. **29A** and **29B**, the actuation surfaces **2910** (FIG. **29A**) and **2910'** (FIG. **29B**) provide an area against which pressurized fluid can exert an axial force on the spool **2966** to slide the spool into the open position. Pressure applied against the actuation surfaces **2910** and **2910'** urge the spool **2966** into the open position.

FIG. **30** is an illustration of a manifold **3020** including a valve **3030**. The valve **3030** may be a hydraulically actuated spool valve including a generally cylindrical-shaped hollow sleeve **3064** that is fixed relative to the manifold **3020**, and a generally cylindrical-shaped spool **3066**, which is slideably disposed around the outside of the sleeve **3064**. The spool **3066** is free to move back and forth over a portion of the length of the sleeve **3064** between an open position and a closed position. The sleeve **3064** and the spool **3066** each may include a series of orifices that extend through the walls of the respective components, where the spool **3066** includes a series of orifices **3080** and the sleeve **3064** includes a series of orifices **3082**. The spool **3066** is shown arranged in the closed position in FIG. **30**, wherein the orifices **3080** of the spool **3066** are substantially fluidly disconnected from the orifices **3082** of the sleeve **3064**. Placing the spool **3066** in the open position (i.e., by sliding the spool to the left in FIG. **30**) fluidly connects the orifices **3080** in the spool with the orifices **3082** in the sleeve **3064**.

The valve **3030** may include an actuator **3008** arranged at a distal end of the spool **3066** for moving the spool **3066** between the open position and the closed position. The actuator **3008** may have a similar configuration as the actuator **2909** shown in FIG. **29B**. In one example, the spool actuator **3008** may be a generally annular ring that may be fixedly attached to the spool **3066** by means of a connector **3010**. The actuator **3008** provides an actuating surface **3011** against which an actuating force can be applied to urge the spool **3066** from the closed position to the open position. The valve **3030** may also include a biasing member, illustrated as a return spring **3006**, for moving the spool **3066** from the open position to the closed position.

The spool actuator **3008** may include a wall thickness T'. Similar to the illustration in FIGS. **29A-29B**, the thickness T' of the spool actuator **3008** may be less than a wall thickness T of the spool **3066** in order to achieve a desired actuating force while allowing the spool **3066** to maintain a desired wall thickness T across the portion of the spool **3066** including the orifices **3080**. The force required to actuate the spool **3066** may be varied by changing the thickness T' of the spool actuator **3008**. This configuration allows the wall thickness T' of the spool actuator **3008** to be sized to obtain a desired actuation force and the wall thickness T of the spool **3066** to be sized to minimize outward deflection of the spool **3066**.

The spool actuator **3008** may be connected to the spool **3066** using the connecting member **3010**. The connecting member **3010** may include a lip **3014** that engages a corresponding lip **3016** on the spool actuator **3008**, and a second lip **3018** that engages a corresponding lip **3019** on the spool **3066**. Other means that may be used to connect the connecting member **3010** to the spool **3066** and the spool actuator **3008**, include but are not limited to, brazing, welding, and gluing. The type of connection method employed will depend at least in part on the type of materials used and the structural requirements of the connection.

Manifold **3020** may include an actuation chamber **3012** that is in fluid communication with the actuation surface **3010** of the spool actuator **3008**. The spool actuator **3008** may be at least partially located within the actuation chamber **3012**. An actuation flow port **3014** may also be provided for supplying pressurized fluid to the actuation chamber **3012** for actuating the valve. The actuation flow port **3014** may be fluidly connected to a pressure source, such as a pump. The actuation chamber **3012** receives fluid pressure from the actuation flow port **3014**. The fluid pressure in the actuation chamber **3012** provides the actuation force used to move the spool **3066** axially within the manifold **3020** to the open position. The actuation force may be exerted on the spool actuator **3008** by the pressurized fluid located within the actuation chamber **3012** to displace the spool **3066** toward the open position. Pressurized fluid may be released from the actuation chamber **3012** to allow the return spring **3006** to urge the spool **3066** into the closed position.

Referring to FIG. **31A**, an alternative configuration of a spool actuator **3108** includes at least one pin **3102** that may be in communication with a distal actuation end **3113** of a spool **3166**. The pins **3102** may be housed within a spool actuator housing **3106** that acts as a guide for the pins **3102** to slide axially within the actuator housing. An actuation chamber **3112** is located adjacent one end of the pin **3102**. A least a portion of the pin **3102** is in fluid communication with the actuation chamber **3012**.

The actuation chamber **3112** receives pressurized fluid from a pressure source. The pressurized fluid provides the actuation force used to move the spool **3166** axially within the manifold **3120** to an open position. The actuation force may be exerted on the pins **3102** by the pressurized fluid located within the actuation chamber **3112**. The actuation force exerted on the ends of the pins **3102** urges the spool **3166** toward the open position. A biasing member, illustrated as a return spring **3106**, may be provided to urge the spool **3166** back to the closed position.

In one exemplary configuration, as shown in FIG. **31B**, four pins **3102** may be arranged within the actuator housing **3106**. The actuator housing **3106** may be fixedly attached to a valve housing **3115**. The actuator housing **3106** may also be configured as part of the valve housing **3115**. It should be noted that while FIG. **31B** illustrates four pins **3102** arranged within the actuator housing **3106** and located equidistant from one another, other configurations using a different number of pins or a different distribution may be used as well. For example, the pin housing **3102** may include five or more pins **3102** that are spaced at unequal distances from one another.

With reference to FIGS. **1** and **32**, hydraulic manifold **20** (see FIG. **1A**) may be integrated with a pump **3212** to form an integrated fluid distribution module **3210**. Integrating the various devices may improve system efficiency by reducing the volume of compressible fluid present within the hydraulic system, which in turn may reduce the total amount of work required to compress the fluid present within the hydraulic system.

For clarity, those components and features of the fluid distribution module **3210** that are in common with the hydraulic manifold **20** are identified using like reference numbers in FIG. **32**. Fluid distribution module **3210** may include the control valves **30**, **32**, **34** and **36** of hydraulic manifold **20**. The control valves **30**, **32**, **34** and **36** may be disposed in a common housing **3212**. Exit ports **44**, **46**, **48** and **50** of the control valves **30**, **32**, **34** and **36**, respectively, are accessible from outside housing **3212** for fluidly connecting various hydraulic loads (not shown) to fluid distribution mod-

ule **3210**. One or more of the control valves may also employ the solenoid operated pilot valve for actuating the respective control valve.

Pressurized fluid for driving various hydraulic loads (not shown) fluidly connected to the control valves may be provided by a fixed displacement pump **3214**. Pump **3214** may include any of a variety of known fixed displacement pumps, including but not limited to, gear pumps, vane pumps, axial piston pumps, and radial piston pumps. The pump **3214** includes a drive shaft **3216** for driving the pump. The drive shaft **3216** can be connected to an external power source, such as an engine, electric motor, or another power source capable of outputting a rotational torque. An inlet port **3218** of the pump **3214** may be fluidly connected to a fluid reservoir (not shown). The inlet port **42** of the hydraulic manifold may be fluidly connected to a discharge port **3220** of pump **3214**.

Although a single pump **3214** is illustrated for purposes of discussion, fluid distribution module **3210** may include multiple pumps, each having their respective discharge ports fluidly connected to a common fluid node from which the individual fluid circuits can be supplied with pressurized fluid. The multiple pumps may be fluidly connected, for example, in parallel to achieve higher flow rates, or in series, such as when higher pressures for a given flow rate are desired.

With regard to the processes, systems, methods, etc. described herein, it should be understood that, although the steps of such processes, etc. have been described as occurring according to a certain ordered sequence, such processes could be practiced with the described steps performed in an order other than the order described herein. It further should be understood that certain steps could be performed simultaneously, that other steps could be added, or that certain steps described herein could be omitted. In other words, the descriptions of processes herein are provided for the purpose of illustrating certain embodiments, and should in no way be construed so as to limit the claimed invention.

It is to be understood that the above description is intended to be illustrative and not restrictive. Many embodiments and applications other than the examples provided would be apparent to those of skill in the art upon reading the above description. The scope of the invention should be determined, not with reference to the above description, but should instead be determined with reference to the appended claims, along with the full scope of equivalents to which such claims are entitled. It is anticipated and intended that future developments will occur in the arts discussed herein, and that the disclosed systems and methods will be incorporated into such future embodiments. In sum, it should be understood that the invention is capable of modification and variation and is limited only by the following claims.

All terms used in the claims are intended to be given their broadest reasonable constructions and their ordinary meanings as understood by those skilled in the art unless an explicit indication to the contrary is made herein. In particular, use of the singular articles such as "a," "the," "said," etc. should be read to recite one or more of the indicated elements unless a claim recites an explicit limitation to the contrary.

What is claimed is:

1. A valve comprising:

a valve body;

several first valve members, each including a first step and each including a first orifice adjacent the respective first step and configured within and fixed relative to the valve body; and

several second valve members, each including a second step and a second orifice adjacent the respective second

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step configured within and movable relative to the valve body, the second valve members movable relative to the first valve members between open positions, in which the first orifices are fluidly connected with the second orifices, and a closed position, in which the first orifices are substantially fluidly disconnected from the second orifices, wherein the first and second steps are fluidly connected to a respective first orifice and a respective second orifice and substantially fluidly disconnected from the remaining orifices when the second valve members are in the closed position, and the first and second steps are fluidly connected to the first and second orifices when the respective second valve member is in the open position;

wherein the first valve members define a portion of a plenum;

wherein the first orifices are fluidly connected to the plenum; and

wherein the plenum is fluidly connected to a plurality of valves.

2. The valve of claim 1, wherein the first and second steps at least partially define a fluid pathway between the first and second orifices when the second valve members are in the open position.

3. The valve of claim 1, further comprising a biasing member in communication with the second valve members, the biasing member urging the second valve members toward the closed position.

4. The valve of claim 3, wherein the first steps are positioned on a side of the respective first orifice furthest away from the biasing member and facing the second steps, and the second steps are located on a side of the first orifices nearest the biasing member when the second valve members are in the closed position.

5. The valve of claim 3, wherein the first steps are positioned on a side of the first orifices closest to the biasing member and the second steps are located on a side of the first orifices furthest away from the biasing member when the second valve members are in the closed position.

6. The valve of claim 3, wherein the second steps are positioned on a side of the second orifices furthest away from the biasing member and the first steps are located on a side of the second orifices nearest the biasing member when the second valve members are in the closed position.

7. The valve of claim 3, wherein the second steps are positioned on a side of the second orifices closest to the biasing member and the first steps are located on a side of the second orifices furthest away from the biasing member when the second valve members are in the closed position.

8. A hydraulic valve manifold comprising:

at least two valve bodies interconnected to form a mainstage manifold, each valve body comprising:

a plurality of first valve members, each including a first step and a respective first orifice adjacent the first steps configured within and fixed relative to the valve body, and

a plurality of second valve members, each including a second step and a respective second orifice adjacent the second steps configured within and movable relative to the valve body, the second valve members movable relative to the first valve members between open positions, in which the first orifices are fluidly connected with the second orifices, and a closed position, in which the first orifices are substantially fluidly disconnected from the

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second orifices, wherein the first and second steps are fluidly connected to a respective first orifice and a respective second orifice and substantially fluidly disconnected from the remaining orifices when the second valve members are in the closed position, and the first and second steps are fluidly connected to the first and second orifices when the respective second valve member is in the open position;

wherein each of the first valve members defines a portion of a plenum;

wherein the plenum extends between and is fluidly connected to the first orifice of each of the at least two valve bodies; and

wherein the mainstage manifold is configured to fluidly control at least a first hydraulic load and a second hydraulic load.

9. The hydraulic valve manifold of claim 8, wherein the first hydraulic load includes a first variable flow and a first predetermined pressure, and wherein the second hydraulic load includes a second variable flow and a second predetermined pressure, the second variable flow is at least one of the same and different than the first variable flow and the second predetermined pressure is at least one of the same and different than the first predetermined pressure.

10. The hydraulic valve manifold of claim 8, wherein movement of the second valve members to the open position fluidly connects the first orifices with the second orifices.

11. The hydraulic valve manifold of claim 8, wherein movement of the second valve members to the closed position substantially fluidly disconnects the first orifices from the second orifices.

12. The hydraulic valve manifold of claim 8, wherein the first and second steps at least partially define a fluid pathway between the first and second orifices when the second valve members are in the open position.

13. The hydraulic valve manifold of claim 8, further comprising a biasing member in communication with the second valve members, the biasing member urging the second valve members toward the closed position.

14. The hydraulic valve manifold of claim 13, wherein the second steps are positioned on a side of the second orifices closest to the biasing member and the first steps are located on a side of the second orifices furthest away from the biasing member when the second valve members are in the closed position.

15. The hydraulic valve manifold of claim 13, wherein the first steps are positioned on a side of the first orifices furthest away from the biasing member and the second steps are located on a side of the first orifices nearest the biasing member when the second valve members are in the closed position.

16. The hydraulic valve manifold of claim 13, wherein the first steps are positioned on a side of the first orifices closest to the biasing member and the second steps are located on a side of the first orifices furthest away from the biasing member when the second valve members are in the closed position.

17. The hydraulic valve manifold of claim 13, wherein the second steps are positioned on a side of the second orifices furthest away from the biasing member and the first steps are located on a side of the second orifices nearest the biasing member when the second valve members are in the closed position.

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